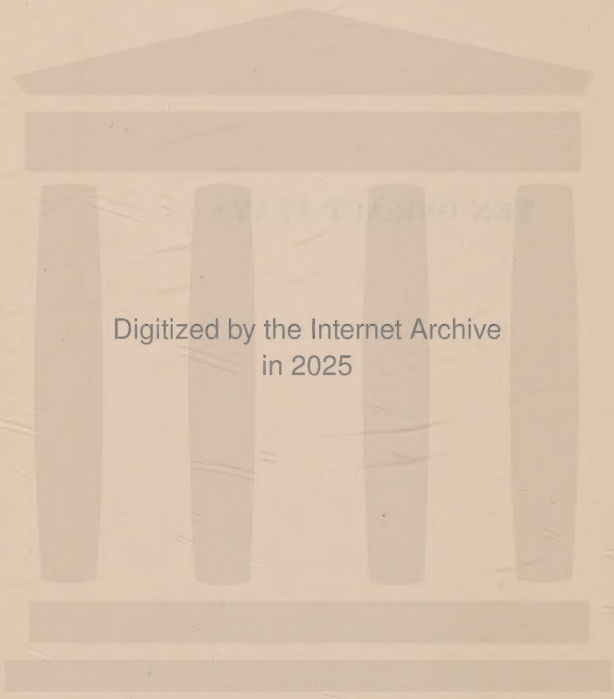
TEN ONE-ACT PLAYS

By

ALICE GERSTENBERG

812
G38
COLLEGE OF MARIN LIBRARY
KENTFIELD, CALIFORNIA

TEN ONE-ACT PLAYS



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/tenoneactplays0000alic_y2g5

TEN ONE-ACT PLAYS

By

ALICE GERSTENBERG

PS
3513
E869
T4
1921

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
55 FIFTH AVENUE · NEW YORK

GERSTENBERG
TEN ONE-ACT PLAYS

COPYRIGHT • 1921
BY LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

All rights reserved

First Edition August 1921
Reprinted October 1922, April 1925
May 1928, March 1930, March 1934
August 1935, November 1936, December 1937
March 1943, October 1946

THESE PLAYS ARE FULLY PROTECTED BY THE COPYRIGHT LAWS AND NO AMATEUR PERFORMANCES OR READINGS OF ANY KIND MAY BE GIVEN WITHOUT THE WRITTEN PERMISSION OF, AND PAYMENT OF ROYALTY TO, THE AUTHOR'S REPRESENTATIVE, LONGMANS, GREEN AND COMPANY, 55 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK, N. Y.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
MONTAUK BOOK MFG. CO. INC., NEW YORK

14440

To My Father
IN ADMIRATION OF
HIS GREAT INTEGRITY
AND TENDERNESS

CONTENTS

He Said and She Said— 1

Overtones 35

The Unseen 67

The Buffer 95

Attuned 135

The Pot Boiler 143

Hearts 187

Beyond 211

Fourteen 221

The Illuminati in Drama Libre . . . 243

HE SAID AND SHE SAID—

A ONE-ACT PLAY

CHARACTERS

DIANA CHESBROUGH, *a society girl*
ENID HALDEMAN, *her friend*
FELIX HALDEMAN, *her husband*
MRS. CYRUS PACKARD, *their friend*

SCENE

Living-room at the Haldemans, before dinner.

COPYRIGHT, 1918, BY ALICE GERSTENBERG

First production at the Community Theatre of Hollywood, California, under direction of Neely Dickson. Later at the Anna Morgan Studios, Chicago, etc.

HE SAID AND SHE SAID—

SCENE: *Living-room at the Haldemans. Discovered Enid setting the room to rights. Enter in hat and coat and jingling a bunch of house keys Felix Haldeman. He kisses Enid affectionately as if it were a daily habit, and then tosses down the evening paper.*

FELIX

Hello, dear.

ENID

Felix, I asked Diana and Mrs. Packard over for dinner. You'd better hurry and wash up a bit.

FELIX

What? Am I to be the *only* man *again?*

ENID

Can't help it, darling. Mr. Packard's in Washington and all of Diana's suitors are in the trenches.

FELIX

There must be some old greybeard left somewhere to invite for *Diana.*

ENID

Oh, there are a few left-overs floating around but Diana doesn't like them. If she can't get the best *male* company she prefers *f*emale.

FELIX

Diana's a peach! She should have married one of the boys before they all went over. Poor Aubrey Laurence was madly in love with her.

ENID

Hurry up, there's soot on your cheek. [*She taps it affectionately.*]

FELIX

All right, if I have to dine with three women I'd better look my best.

ENID

[*Admiringly*] Yes, my dear Cock of the Walk.

FELIX

There're the evening papers. We gained three miles again. [*Exit down left.*]

ENID

[*Is about to glance at the paper but is interrupted by the breezy entrance of Mrs. Packard.*]

MRS. PACKARD

My dear, your maid told me to come right in.

ENID

Oh, Mrs. Packard, I'm so glad you could come on such short notice.

MRS. PACKARD

I jumped at the invitation. It's so lonesome with John away. How lucky *you* are to have your husband at home.

ENID

Thanks to his business, the Government prefers him here. Take off your things.

MRS. PACKARD

I'm a little early but I took advantage of the chance to ride this way in Mrs. Morgan's car. Do you like Mrs. Morgan?

ENID

Why, yes, don't you?

MRS. PACKARD

I don't think *you* ought to like her.

ENID

Why not?

MRS. PACKARD

She has a long, bad tongue.

ENID

Talks about people—

MRS. PACKARD

[*Raises her eye-brows.*] *Does* she? You ought to hear her—but then *you* ought *not* to hear her.

ENID

About me?

MRS. PACKARD

Now, there, my dear, I have come for a jolly little dinner-party and I'm *not* going to gossip.

ENID

Still, if she said anything against *me*, I ought to protect myself—

MRS. PACKARD

That's just it, that's what I thought—and when she said—Oh, no, why should I tell you—

ENID

Why *shouldn't* you tell me?

MRS. PACKARD

Yes, why shouldn't I? After all, I'm one of your *best* friends and you ought to know—

ENID

Certainly, I ought to know—

MRS. PACKARD

But you may never forgive me—

ENID

Not forgive you for protecting me?

MRS. PACKARD

That's true, you must protect yourself. It is my duty to tell you.

ENID

What *is* it? You have me quite scared.

MRS. PACKARD

If she tells me a thing like that, of course, she will tell everyone else. By this time, no doubt, it's all over town.

ENID

How dreadful—what have I done—

MRS. PACKARD

It isn't what you've done—it's about Diana Chesbrough.

ENID

She's coming to-night.

MRS. PACKARD

Is she? *Your* invitation?

ENID

Why, yes,—

MRS. PACKARD

Are you sure?

ENID

[*A bit impatiently.*] Of course, I'm sure.

MRS. PACKARD

Well— [*She raises her shoulders and eyebrows.*]

ENID

But in what way can gossip couple my name with Diana's? She is one of my *best* friends.

MRS. PACKARD

Oh, *is* she?

ENID

[*Stoutly*] I am quite sure she is.

MRS. PACKARD

Maybe she is—still, they wonder why Diana

didn't marry one of the boys before they went off to war.

ENID

Why should she have—

MRS. PACKARD

Yes, why should she have really—still—anyone as attractive as Diana—she had plenty of chances, didn't she?

ENID

Oh, yes.

MRS. PACKARD

That's what they say. All nice men, too, and one or two real catches—don't you think it's strange Diana didn't marry one of them?

ENID

Yes, I do think it's strange.

MRS. PACKARD

[*Pouncingly*] There! Of course you do! I *said* it! But why do you think she didn't?

ENID

I don't know.

MRS. PACKARD

What does *she* say?

ENID

I think she—

MRS. PACKARD

Exactly! It's just what everyone is saying. And everybody feels so sorry for *you*.

ENID.

Sorry for *me?*

MRS. PACKARD

My dear, *you* get all the sympathy.

ENID.

What for?

MRS. PACKARD

Is it possible you have been so blind?

ENID.

Blind, I?

MRS. PACKARD

You're with each other a great deal aren't you?

ENID.

Yes,—

MRS. PACKARD

And your husband—

ENID.

Ah, *that's* what you mean—

MRS. PACKARD

Oh, my poor dear, *that's* what they *say*—

ENID.

Just *what* do they say?

MRS. PACKARD

That she and—oh, no, my dear, of course I don't believe it, but—

ENID.

[*Worried*] But just in exact words what *do* they say—

MRS. PACKARD

Hasn't he ever admired her in your presence—

ENID.

Yes—

MRS. PACKARD

What does *he* say—

ENID

Oh, that she's a peach and popular and all the men like her and many of them want to marry her and—

MRS. PACKARD

There you are! That's *just* it! They said so and Mrs. Morgan told me that Diana refused the other men because—well she said because—

[*Sees Diana entering, changes subject quickly.*]

Oh, Diana, you dear, sweet thing, good evening.

DIANA

[*Enters back centre, gay, happy, pretty, unconsciously friendly.*]

Hello, Mrs. Packard. Hello, Enid, old top.

[*Kisses Enid.*]

I'm early, because I came straight up from town after dressing at the club. Canteen work all day. How's everybody?

ENID.

I've been nursing at the hospital all afternoon.

DIANA

Isn't Enid a trump, doing the home nursing and

releasing someone else to get the glory over there? I'd have gone over there myself—

MRS. PACKARD

[*Pouncingly*] *Why* didn't you?

DIANA

Against the law. I have relatives in the trenches. Oh, I'd *love* the romance of being there. Enid, get the letter from your brother, won't you, and read it to Mrs. Packard? He gives such unusually interesting descriptions—

ENID.

Yes, it's most interesting. Excuse me a moment, it's in my desk upstairs.

[*Exit Enid back centre.*]

MRS. PACKARD

[*With a backward glance to see if Enid is out of hearing*] My dear Miss Chesbrough, pardon me for seeming to presume, but I am only trying to save you. Are you aware of what people are saying about you?

DIANA

Saying about me?

MRS. PACKARD

Of course they wouldn't say it *to* you—

DIANA

What wouldn't they say?

MRS. PACKARD

It is so much easier to flatter than to say disagreeable things—

DIANA

People are saying disagreeable things about me?

MRS. PACKARD

You haven't heard?

DIANA

No, but I should certainly like to know—

MRS. PACKARD

Of course you would; any young girl like you—but my dear, do you really think you should come to this house—

DIANA

Come to this house? Why, Enid and I went to school together, she is one of my oldest and best friends—

MRS. PACKARD

Best—did you say?

DIANA

You doubt it?

MRS. PACKARD

After what *she* said?

DIANA

She said something to make you doubt her friendship to *me*—surely you are mistaken—

MRS. PACKARD

My dear girl, I have eyes and ears—I can see and hear—

DIANA

What did Enid say?

MRS. PACKARD

She said she wished you had married one of the boys before they went to war—

DIANA

Oh, that—

MRS. PACKARD

You admit it! And still you come here—*that* is what people say—

DIANA

What do I admit? I don't follow your reasoning—I don't see—

MRS. PACKARD

Of course you don't see—love is always blind—

DIANA

Love! We haven't said a word about love—

MRS. PACKARD

Of course not, it is a delicate word to use and in this matter it is—well, the world does not think it becoming—

DIANA

[*Indignantly*] Mrs. Packard I do not understand your innuendos—tell me the plain facts—

what are people saying—and what has love got to do with it?

MRS. PACKARD

Mr. Haldeman.

DIANA

[*Laughs*] Felix?

MRS. PACKARD

And *you!*

DIANA

I?

MRS. PACKARD

They couple your names together.

DIANA

[*Furiously*] They say that Felix and I— it is a lie—

MRS. PACKARD

It doesn't make any difference if it *is* a lie—the point is what people say—

DIANA

The people who say such things have rotten little minds that haven't enough brains to entertain themselves—

MRS. PACKARD

[*Shocked*] My dear Miss Chesbrough—

DIANA

And you're just the same repeating such slander—

MRS. PACKARD

[*Angrily*] You insinuate that I am one of the—

DIANA

I do.

MRS. PACKARD

You have insulted me!

DIANA

Not more than you have insulted *me!*

MRS. PACKARD

[*Furiously*] Miss Chesbrough, you will suffer for this! I tell you something in all friendliness of spirit to protect you from the slanders of the world and then you reward me by—

DIANA

You listen to idle tongues and then you come and rob me of my happiness—by putting poison into my mind—

MRS. PACKARD

I was telling you the *truth*, but people do not thank you for telling them the truth—

DIANA

I am the one who knows what the truth is! I know that Enid and I are friends and that Enid and Felix and I are friends and that is all. Felix adores Enid, he would never care for any other woman—

MRS. PACKARD

Oh, wouldn't he? Does the world know more than Mrs. Haldeman herself? It does *not!* Just

a few moments ago in this very room she told me herself that she wished you had married because she knows that Felix is in love with you—she pretends to be your friend but in her heart she hates you—

DIANA

It's not true!

MRS. PACKARD

It is not pleasant to argue with you, Miss Chesbrough. I shall find my hostess and make my excuses and not stay to dinner—

[*Exit up centre.*]

DIANA

[*Goes as if to follow her.*]

If I have been too utterly rude, I humbly apologize but I cannot allow you to circulate such outrageous —

FELIX

[*Enters from down left.*]

Hello, Diana, when did *you* get here? Want to help me mix the cocktails?

[*Goes to side table and begins to mix drinks.*]

DIANA

Felix, a terrible thing has happened—they talk about us!

FELIX

Who is *they* and who is *us?*

DIANA

People are talking about you and me—

FELIX

[*Mixing cocktail*] Why, what have we done. Do you like a drop of orange bitters?

DIANA

You're not taking it seriously.

FELIX

But what *is* there—

DIANA

That's just it—what *is* there—if there really *were* something—[*She watches him anxiously*] It's most embarrassing for *me*—I don't know how to say it to *you*—

FELIX

My dear Diana, you can say anything to *me*—haven't I proved myself a real friend—

DIANA

But if what they say is really—true—

FELIX

Don't *you* know whether it's true or not—

DIANA

I thought I did—but after she said it I began to wonder—

FELIX

Wonder *what?*

DIANA

[*Hesitates*] Oh—

FELIX

Out with it!

DIANA

You know I love Enid—

FELIX

Why, you've grown up together—

DIANA

I wouldn't hurt her for worlds—

FELIX

No, you trump!

DIANA

So do *you* love her more than any one else—don't you?

FELIX

Of course—but—

DIANA

[*Horrified*] Don't say *but*—

FELIX

But *why*—

DIANA

Why did you say "but"—

FELIX

Did I say "but"? I don't know, what was I saying—

DIANA

You said *of course—BUT*—

FELIX
I don't remember—you have me all confused—

DIANA
You don't think I'm in love with you, do you?

FELIX
Great Scott, do they say you are in love with me?

DIANA
You never have thought have you—

FELIX
I'm not so conceited to think I could—

DIANA
Ah, then—*but*—

FELIX
Well, *now, what, but*—

DIANA
Are you in love with me?

FELIX
[*Shouts*] No!

DIANA
Thank goodness! But—

FELIX
What—

DIANA
That's what they say—

FELIX
That I am in love with you—

DIANA

And that I am in love with *you*—

FELIX

And—

DIANA

Exactly!

FELIX

Holy smokes!

DIANA

But it's *not* true!

FELIX

[*Shouts*] No!

DIANA

But they *say* it's true!

FELIX

And what they *say*—

DIANA

Amounts to the same thing—

FELIX

What can we do?

DIANA

That's what I'm asking *you*—

FELIX

Go straight to Enid—

DIANA

But Enid believes it!

FELIX

Nonsense!

DIANA

She said so—

FELIX

What "*she*" said so?

DIANA

Mrs. Packard said they *all* say it.

FELIX

How do *they* know?

DIANA

They *don't*, but they *think* they do so it amounts to the *same* thing.

FELIX

But Enid can't believe it—

DIANA

But there's proof that she *does* believe it—

FELIX

It's too absurd—

DIANA

Mrs. Packard said that *Enid* said that *you* said you were in love with *me* or something like that—and that Enid hates me—

FELIX

That's not true, I know she likes you—

DIANA

But Mrs. Packard wouldn't dare say anything—

FELIX

She said Enid hates you—

DIANA

Perhaps Enid does—perhaps she is jealous over nothing at all—perhaps she has been imagining things—perhaps she *does* hate me—perhaps she *too* has been saying things—making it seem as if—

[*She stops as Enid enters followed by Mrs. Packard centre.*]

ENID

Diana, Mrs. Packard says you insulted her and that she feels she cannot stay for dinner—

DIANA

I apologized to Mrs. Packard but she would not accept my—

MRS. PACKARD

Ah, you *do* admit you insulted me—

DIANA

Only after you insulted *me!*

MRS. PACKARD

You hear, Mrs. Haldeman? It is just as I said, she accused me of insulting her when I was trying only to be kind and give her a little motherly advice—

DIANA

Mrs. Packard took it upon herself to repeat

some things that people are saying—things that are manifestly untrue—

ENID

Whether they are true or not—it is highly unpleasant for me to have this altercation in my house—

DIANA

I can tell by your voice that you are willing to believe that woman—

MRS. PACKARD

Mrs. Haldeman, I resent being called *that* woman—

DIANA

I don't care what you resent—, you've come in and spoilt a beautiful friendship I've had all my life and I don't care what I call you—

ENID

But in my house—my guests—

DIANA

Don't worry—I shall not be your guest another moment—I'm going— [*Starts*].

ENID

No, Diana, I can't let you leave in—anger.

DIANA

But I do—I leave with my heart black against you for listening to what she said—

MRS. PACKARD

What did I say?

DIANA

You said that Felix and I were in love with each other and you insinuated that—

MRS. PACKARD

I never said such a thing in all my life!

DIANA

Mrs. Packard! Why just a few moments ago in this very room you—

MRS. PACKARD

I never said such a thing in all my life!

DIANA

Can you look me straight in the eyes and tell me you never said it?

MRS. PACKARD

I *never* said it! never, never, *never!*

DIANA

Didn't you tell me that you have eyes and ears and that you can see and hear—and that everybody was saying—

MRS. PACKARD

But what *everybody* else says isn't what *I* say!

DIANA

Didn't you tell me that Felix was in love with me—

MRS. PACKARD

I didn't know that! *She* told me that!

[*Turns to Enid.*]

ENID

I never told you that!

MRS. PACKARD

Why, my dear, you did! In this very room, a few moments ago—

ENID

I never said such a thing in all my life—and how you can imagine—

MRS. PACKARD

I imagine nothing! I know what I see and what I hear and you certainly told me that you ought to know all I had heard so you could *protect* yourself. So I told you in a friendly way, trying to be a help and there we are.

DIANA

[*Bitterly*] Yes, *where* are we?

MRS. PACKARD

You have no one to blame but yourself.

DIANA

We have no one to blame but *you*—

ENID

Mrs. Packard, I didn't know I *had* to protect myself—until you insinuated—

MRS. PACKARD

Why, it was *you* yourself who said that he wanted to marry her—

ENID

I said nothing of the sort. I said that he said—

[*All women turn simultaneously upon Felix who up to this time has refrained from meddling in the quarrel. He is confused by this sudden demand upon him and answers foolishly.*]

FELIX

I don't know what you're talking about.

MRS. PACKARD

Didn't you say to your wife that you wanted to marry Miss Chesbrough and didn't—

FELIX

I never said such a thing in all my life and whoever said it got it out of whole cloth!

MRS. PACKARD

He denies it of course.

DIANA

He *has* to deny it. To admit it would be false.

MRS. PACKARD

Whether it was true or false he would have to deny it.

DIANA

Why would he have to deny it?

MRS. PACKARD

Because the ethics of a gentleman would make him deny it in order to protect you—

DIANA

[*Raging*] So it doesn't matter whether it is true

or not—nothing we can say or do can wipe out the miserable thoughts in your mind—

MRS. PACKARD

Not my mind! *Everybody's* mind! *I* have nothing to do with it!

DIANA

Enid, can't you stand up and defend us?

MRS. PACKARD

Ah, you admit you must be defended.

DIANA

The whole world has to be defended against women like you! If you were in my house *I'd* show you the door. Enid, show her the door and prove that you trust Felix and me, that you know there isn't and never has been anything between us but the most innocent friendship—you don't move, you don't trust me—

ENID

I have always trusted you—I never had the slightest suspicion—but perhaps I have been blind—perhaps the world has been able to see better from the distance and understand—

FELIX

Are you going to take the world's word against ours? Are you going to believe a silly gossip and let one minute of slander outweigh the love and loyalty you've had from Diana and me for a lifetime—

MRS. PACKARD

Why don't you tell your wife you love her?

FELIX

I love my wife but I do not see any reason to make a public statement of it. I stated that publicly when I married her. She knows I love her—don't you—

ENID

Do I?

DIANA

He adores you—

FELIX

Don't you know it—

ENID

But Diana is pretty and—

DIANA

Felix! I leave this house—forever! Thanks to you, Mrs. Packard, I have lost two friends who meant more to me than even the world's opinion. I shall never see either of you again!

FELIX

Diana, come back! It is too outrageous to allow such contemptible gossip to break your friendship with Enid.

MRS. PACKARD

You see he does not want her to go—

DIANA

It would never be the same between Enid and me again.

FELIX

I do not want her to go because I do not want to have an evil tongue like yours triumphant! If you had come into our home and stolen our silver you would be less a thief than you are now. New silver can be bought—but tarnished friendship can never be bright again. You caused this by your malicious remarks about my regard for Miss Chesbrough.

MRS. PACKARD

I didn't say it.

FELIX

Pardon me, you did!

MRS. PACKARD

I didn't say it, *she* did.
[*Turning to Enid.*]

ENID

I didn't.

MRS. PACKARD

You did.

ENID

I didn't!

DIANA

What does it matter now how it happened! It's done! done! Our friendship is over but—I won't go without leaving my memory here white and clean—I don't care what the world believes but I want Enid to know I've never had a thought against

her—and so I'm going to tell the truth even though I would rather have died than tell this before—

MRS. PACKARD

Ah, now we will hear something–

FELIX

Diana, be careful—you are under no obligations to—

ENID

[*To Felix*] So you know what she is going to say?

DIANA

No, he doesn't know. It is my secret. No one else has known. There is only one man I love or ever have loved and he's over there.

MRS. PACKARD

She's making it up, a likely story—

DIANA

I'm not making it up! If you don't believe me I'll have to tell you his name—

FELIX

No, no, Diana, it is not fair to demand that of you—

DIANA

They will not believe me—but I'll do anything for Enid—she'll have to know. It is Aubrey Laurence.

MRS. PACKARD

Aubrey Laurence! He wanted to marry you—

ENID

It's true he did—but Diana wouldn't—

MRS. PACKARD

Why wouldn't you?

DIANA

Because I *did.*

FELIX and ENID

You married him?

DIANA

[*Takes wedding-ring from chain about her neck.*]

Yes! I married him, the last day before he sailed—

MRS. PACKARD

But your family didn't like him—

DIANA

That's why I didn't tell them, but you can go now and tell them yourself, Mrs. Packard.

FELIX

Aubrey Laurence! Did you really, Diana?

MRS. PACKARD

He hasn't any money.

FELIX

But he's straight to the core! *I'm* awfully glad Diana!

ENID

So am I, Diana! Forgive me!

DIANA

There's the door, Mrs. Packard, and the world outside is waiting to hear the latest gossip!

MRS. PACKARD

I'll go, my dear, because I've offended you and I know you are not ready to forgive me, but I promise not to breathe it to a soul—not to a soul—

[*Exit up centre in such a way that one knows she is excited and eager to tell it to every one she meets.*]

ENID

Diana, I'll never *forgive you* for not telling *me* you *married* Aubrey. Why didn't you tell me that you married Aubrey?

DIANA

But I didn't.

FELIX

You didn't?

ENID

But you said—

DIANA

Oh, what I *said!* It doesn't matter what I *said*—

ENID

But she'll tell everyone.

DIANA

Of course she will—

ENID

But if it's not true—

DIANA

It might be true—

ENID

But it's not—is it?

DIANA

I told you it wasn't—

ENID

But now I don't know whether to believe you or not—

DIANA

Nor will other people know whether to believe her or not—

FELIX

But when *Aubrey* hears of it—Diana—what will *he* think—

DIANA

He will wish that it were true—

FELIX

But what will he say about *you*—

DIANA

He will say that *I* wish it were true—

FELIX

And *do* you?

DIANA

I do!

ENID

Have you found out since he left that you really love him—

DIANA

Madly—madly—madly—

FELIX

[*Teasingly*] Shall I cable him that?

DIANA

I have already.

ENID

You haven't!

DIANA

I *have*. I'm going to marry him by proxy.

FELIX

[*Offering glass*] Do have a cocktail on that.

ENID

But when we tell people you married him by proxy after Mrs. Packard has told them you are married already, what *will* people say?

DIANA

[*Takes cocktail with a smile*] What *will* people *say?* In *any* case, *exactly* what *they choose!*

CURTAIN

OVERTONES

A ONE-ACT PLAY

CHARACTERS

HARRIET, *a cultured woman*
HETTY, *her primitive self*
MARGARET, *a cultured woman*
MAGGIE, *her primitive self*

"Overtones" was produced by the Washington Square Players under the direction of Edward Goodman at the Bandbox Theatre, New York City, beginning November 8, 1915, to represent an American one-act play on a bill of four comparative comedies, "Literature" by Arthur Schnitzler of Austria, "The Honorable Lover" by Roberto Bracco of Italy, and "Whims" by Alfred de Musset of France. In the cast were the following:

HETTY . . . . . *Josephine A. Meyer*
HARRIET, her overtone . . . *Agnes McCarthy*
MAGGIE . . . . . *Noël Haddon*
MARGARET, her overtone . . . *Grace Griswold*

The scene was designed by Lee Simonson and the costumes and draperies by Bertha Holley.

"Overtones" was subsequently presented in vaudeville by Martin Beck, beginning at the Palace Theatre, Chicago, February 28, 1916, with Helene Lackaye as star, with the following cast:

HARRIET, a cultured woman . . . *Helene Lackaye*
HETTY, her primitive self . . . *Ursula Faucett*
MARGARET, a cultured woman . . *Francesca Rotoli*
MAGGIE, her primitive self . . . *Nellie Dent*

The scene was designed by Jerome Blum.

Next played in London by Lily Langtry. Published by Doubleday, Page & Co. in a volume of "Four Washington Square Plays."

COPYRIGHT, 1913, BY ALICE GERSTENBERG

OVERTONES

TIME: *The present.*

SCENE: *Harriet's fashionable living-room. The door at the back leads to the hall. In the centre a tea table with a high-backed chair at each side.*

Harriet's gown is a light, "jealous" green. Her counterpart, Hetty, wears a gown of the same design but in a darker shade. Margaret wears a gown of lavender chiffon while her counterpart, Maggie, wears a gown of the same design in purple, a purple scarf veiling her face. Chiffon is used to give a sheer effect, suggesting a possibility of primitive and cultured selves merging into one woman. The primitive and cultured selves never come into actual physical contact but try to sustain the impression of mental conflict. Harriet never sees Hetty, never talks to her but rather thinks aloud looking into space. Hetty, however, looks at Harriet, talks intently and shadows her continually. The same is true of Margaret and Maggie. The voices of the cultured women are affected and lingering, the voices of the primitive impulsive and more or less staccato.

When the curtain rises Harriet is seated right of tea table, busying herself with the tea things.

HETTY

Harriet. [*There is no answer.*] Harriet, my other self. [*There is no answer.*] My trained self.

HARRIET

[*Listens intently*] Yes?

[*From behind Harriet's chair Hetty rises slowly.*]

HETTY

I want to talk to you.

HARRIET

Well?

HETTY

[*Looking at Harriet admiringly*] Oh, Harriet, you are beautiful to-day.

HARRIET

Am I presentable, Hetty?

HETTY

Suits me.

HARRIET

I've tried to make the best of the good points.

HETTY

My passions are deeper than yours. I can't keep on the mask as you do. I'm crude and real, you are my appearance in the world.

HARRIET

I am what you wish the world to believe you are.

HETTY

You are the part of me that has been trained.

HARRIET

I am your educated self.

HETTY

I am the rushing river; you are the ice over the current.

HARRIET

I am your subtle overtones.

HETTY

But together we are one woman, the wife of Charles Goodrich.

HARRIET

There I disagree with you, Hetty, I alone am his wife.

HETTY

[*Indignantly*] Harriet, how can you say such a thing!

HARRIET

Certainly. I am the one who flatters him. I have to be the one who talks to him. If I gave you a chance you would tell him at once that you dislike him.

HETTY

[*Moving away*] I don't love him, that's certain.

HARRIET

You leave all the fibbing to me. He doesn't suspect that my calm, suave manner hides your hatred. Considering the amount of scheming it causes me it can safely be said that he is my husband.

HETTY

Oh, if you love him—

HARRIET

I? I haven't any feelings. It isn't my business to love anybody.

HETTY

Then why need you object to calling him my husband?

HARRIET

I resent your appropriation of a man who is managed only through the cleverness of my artifice.

HETTY

You may be clever enough to deceive him, Harriet, but I am still the one who suffers. I can't forget he is my husband. I can't forget that I might have married John Caldwell.

HARRIET

How foolish of you to remember John, just because we met his wife by chance.

HETTY

That's what I want to talk to you about. She may be here at any moment. I want to advise you about what to say to her this afternoon.

HARRIET

By all means tell me now and don't interrupt while she is here. You have a most annoying habit of talking to me when people are present. Sometimes it is all I can do to keep my poise and appear *not* to be listening to you.

HETTY

Impress her.

HARRIET

Hetty, dear, is it not my custom to impress people?

HETTY

I hate her.

HARRIET

I can't let her see that.

HETTY

I hate her because she married John.

HARRIET

Only after you had refused him.

HETTY

[*Turning to Harriet*] Was it my fault that I refused him?

HARRIET

That's right, blame me.

HETTY

It was your fault. You told me he was too poor and never would be able to do anything in painting. Look at him now, known in Europe, just returned from eight years in Paris, famous.

HARRIET

It was too poor a gamble at the time. It was much safer to accept Charles's money and position.

HETTY

And then John married Margaret within the year.

HARRIET

Out of spite.

HETTY

Freckled, gauky-looking thing she was, too.

HARRIET

[*A little sadly*] Europe improved her. She was stunning the other morning.

HETTY

Make her jealous to-day.

HARRIET

Shall I be haughty or cordial or caustic or—

HETTY

Above all else you must let her know that we are rich.

HARRIET

Oh, yes, I do that quite easily now.

HETTY

You must put it on a bit.

HARRIET

Never fear.

HETTY

Tell her I love my husband.

HARRIET

My husband—

HETTY

Are you going to quarrel with me?

HARRIET

[*Moves away*] No, I have no desire to quarrel with you. It is quite too uncomfortable. I couldn't get away from you if I tried.

HETTY

[*Stamping her foot and following Harriet*] You were a stupid fool to make me refuse John, I'll never forgive you—never—

HARRIET

[*Stopping and holding up her hand*] Don't get me all excited. I'll be in no condition to meet her properly this afternoon.

HETTY

[*Passionately*] I could choke you for robbing me of John.

HARRIET

[*Retreating*] Don't muss me!

HETTY

You don't know how you have made me suffer.

HARRIET

[*Beginning to feel the strength of Hetty's emotion surge through her and trying to conquer it*] It is not my business to have heartaches.

HETTY

You're bloodless. Nothing but sham—sham—while I—

HARRIET

[*Emotionally*] Be quiet! I can't let her see that I have been fighting with my inner self.

HETTY

And now after all my suffering you say it has cost you more than it has cost me to be married to Charles. But it's the pain here in my heart—I've paid the price—I've paid—Charles is not your husband!

HARRIET

[*Trying to conquer emotion*] He is.

HETTY

[*Follows Harriet*] He isn't.

HARRIET

[*Weakly*] He is.

HETTY

[*Towering over Harriet*] He isn't! I'll kill you!

HARRIET

[*Overpowered, sinks into a chair*] Don't—don't you're stronger than I—you're—

HETTY

Say he's mine.

HARRIET

He's ours.

HETTY

[*The telephone rings*] There she is now.

[*Hetty hurries to 'phone but Harriet regains her supremacy.*]

HARRIET

[*Authoritatively*] Wait! I can't let the tele-

phone girl down there hear my real self. It isn't proper. [*At 'phone.*] Show Mrs. Caldwell up.

HETTY

I'm so excited, my heart's in my mouth.

HARRIET

[*At the mirror*] A nice state you've put my nerves into.

HETTY

Don't let her see you're nervous

HARRIET*

Quick, put the veil on, or she'll see *you* shining through me.

[*Harriet takes a scarf of chiffon that has been lying over the back of a chair and drapes it on Hetty, covering her face. The chiffon is the same color of their gowns but paler in shade so that it pales Hetty's darker gown to match Harriet's lighter one. As Hetty moves in the following scene the chiffon falls away revealing now and then the gown of deeper dye underneath.*]

HETTY

Tell her Charles is rich and fascinating—boast of our friends, make her feel she needs us.

HARRIET

I'll make her ask John to paint us.

---

*(The vaudeville production did not use Harriet's line about the veil because at the rise of the curtain Hetty is already veiled in chiffon the same dark green shade as her gown.)

HETTY

That's just my thought—if John paints our portrait—

HARRIET

We can wear an exquisite gown—

HETTY

And make him fall in love again and—

HARRIET

[*Schemingly*] Yes.

[*Margaret parts the portières back centre and extends her hand. Margaret is followed by her counterpart Maggie.*]

Oh, Margaret, I'm so glad to see you!

HETTY

[*To Maggie*] That's a lie.

MARGARET

[*In superficial voice throughout*] It's enchanting to see you, Harriet.

MAGGIE

[*In emotional voice throughout*] I'd bite you, if I dared.

HARRIET

[*To Margaret*] Wasn't our meeting a stroke of luck?

MARGARET

[*Coming down left of table*] I've thought of you so often, Harriet; and to come back and find you living in New York.

HARRIET

[*Coming down right of table*] Mr. Goodrich has many interests here.

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] Flatter her.

MARGARET

I know, Mr. Goodrich is so successful.

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] Tell her we're rich.

HARRIET

[*To Margaret*] Won't you sit down?

MARGARET

[*Takes a chair*] What a beautiful cabinet!*

HARRIET

Do you like it? I'm afraid Charles paid an extravagant price.

MAGGIE

[*To Hetty*] I don't believe it.

MARGARET

[*Sitting down. To Harriet*] I am sure he must have.

HARRIET

[*Sitting down*] How well you are looking, Margaret.

HETTY

Yes, you are not. There are circles under your eyes.

---

* What beautiful lamps! (In vaudeville production.)

14440

MAGGIE

[*To Hetty*] I haven't eaten since breakfast and I'm hungry.

MARGARET

[*To Harriet*] How well you are looking, too.

MAGGIE

[*To Hetty*] You have hard lines about your lips, are you happy?

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] Don't let her know that I'm unhappy.

HARRIET

[*To Margaret*] Why shouldn't I look well? My life is full, happy, complete—

MAGGIE

I wonder.

HETTY

[*In Harriet's ear*] Tell her we have an automobile.

MARGARET

[*To Harriet*] My life is complete, too.

MAGGIE

My heart is torn with sorrow; my husband cannot make a living. He will kill himself if he does not get an order for a painting.

MARGARET

[*Laughs*] You must come and see us in our studio. John has been doing some excellent portraits. He cannot begin to fill his orders.

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] Tell her we have an automobile.

HARRIET

[*To Margaret*] Do you take lemon in your tea?

MAGGIE

Take cream. It's more filling.

MARGARET

[*Looking nonchalantly at tea things*] No, cream, if you please. How cozy!

MAGGIE

[*Glaring at tea things*] Only cakes! I could eat them all!

HARRIET

[*To Margaret*] How many lumps?

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] Sugar is nourishing.

MARGARET

[*To Harriet*] Three, please. I used to drink very sweet coffee in Turkey and ever since I've—

HETTY

I don't believe you were ever in Turkey.

MAGGIE

I wasn't, but it is none of your business.

HARRIET

[*Pouring tea*] Have you been in Turkey, do tell me about it.

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] Change the subject.

MARGARET

[*To Harriet*] You must go there. You have so much taste in dress you would enjoy seeing their costumes.

MAGGIE

Isn't she going to pass the cake?

MARGARET

[*To Harriet*] John painted several portraits there.

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] Why don't you stop her bragging and tell her we have an automobile?

HARRIET

[*Offers cake across the table to Margaret*] Cake?

MAGGIE

[*Stands back of Margaret, shadowing her as Hetty shadows Harriet. Maggie reaches claws out for the cake and groans with joy.*] At last! [*But her claws do not touch the cake.*]

MARGARET

[*With a graceful, nonchalant hand places cake upon her plate and bites at it slowly and delicately*]. Thank you.

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] Automobile!

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] Follow up the costumes with the

suggestion that she would make a good model for John. It isn't too early to begin getting what you came for.

MARGARET

[*Ignoring Maggie*] What delicious cake.

HETTY

[*Excitedly to Harriet*] There's your chance for the auto.

HARRIET

[*Nonchalantly to Margaret*] Yes, it is good cake, isn't it? There are always a great many people buying it at Harper's. I sat in my automobile fifteen minutes this morning waiting for my chauffeur to get it.

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] Make her order a portrait.

MARGARET

[*To Harriet*] If you stopped at Harper's you must have noticed the new gowns at Henderson's. Aren't the shop windows alluring these days?

HARRIET

Even my chauffeur notices them.

MAGGIE

I know you have an automobile, I heard you the first time.

MARGARET

I notice gowns now with an artist's eye as John does. The one you have on, my dear, is very paintable.

HETTY

Don't let her see you're anxious to be painted.

HARRIET

[*Nonchalantly*] Oh, it's just a little model.

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] Don't seem anxious to get the order.

MARGARET

[*Nonchalantly*] Perhaps it isn't the gown itself but the way you wear it that pleases the eye. Some people can wear anything with grace.

HETTY

Yes, I'm very graceful.

HARRIET

[*To Margaret*] You flatter me, my dear.

MARGARET

On the contrary, Harriet, I have an intense admiration for you. I remember how beautiful you were—as a girl. In fact, I was quite jealous when John was paying you so much attention.

HETTY

She is gloating because I lost him.

HARRIET

Those were childhood days in a country town.

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] She's trying to make you feel that John was only a country boy.

MARGARET

Most great men have come from the country. There is a fair chance that John will be added to the list.

HETTY

I know it and I am bitterly jealous of you.

HARRIET

Undoubtedly he owes much of his success to you, Margaret, your experience in economy and your ability to endure hardship. Those first few years in Paris must have been a struggle.

MAGGIE

She is sneering at your poverty.

MARGARET

Yes, we did find life difficult at first, not the luxurious start a girl has who marries wealth.

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] Deny that you married Charles for his money.

[*Harriet deems it wise to ignore Hetty's advice.*]

MARGARET

But John and I are so congenial in our tastes, that we were impervious to hardship or unhappiness.

HETTY

[*In anguish*] Do you love each other? Is it really true?

HARRIET

[*Sweetly*] Did you have all the romance of starving for his art?

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] She's taunting you. Get even with her.

MARGARET

Not for long. Prince Rier soon discovered John's genius, and introduced him royally to wealthy Parisians who gave him many orders.

HETTY

[*To Maggie*] Are you telling the truth or are you lying?

HARRIET

If he had so many opportunities there, you must have had great inducements to come back to the States.

MAGGIE

[*To Hetty*] We did, but not the kind you think.

MARGARET

John became the rage among Americans travelling in France, too, and they simply insisted upon his coming here.

HARRIET

Whom is he going to paint here?

MAGGIE

[*Frightened*] What names dare I make up?

MARGARET

[*Calmly*] Just at present Miss Dorothy Ainsworth of Oregon is posing. You may not know the name, but she is the daughter of a wealthy miner who found gold in Alaska.

HARRIET

I dare say there are many Western people we have never heard of.

MARGARET

You must have found social life in New York very interesting, Harriet, after the simplicity of our home town.

HETTY

[*To Maggie*] There's no need to remind us that our beginnings were the same.

HARRIET

Of course Charles's family made everything delightful for me. They are so well connected.

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] Flatter her.

MARGARET

I heard it mentioned yesterday that you had made yourself very popular. Some one said you were very clever!

HARRIET

[*Pleased*] Who told you that

MAGGIE

Nobody!

MARGARET

[*Pleasantly*] Oh, confidences should be suspected —respected, I mean. They said, too, that you are gaining some reputation as a critic of art.

HARRIET

I make no pretenses.

MARGARET

Are you and Mr. Goodrich interested in the same things, too?

HETTY

No!

HARRIET

Yes, indeed, Charles and I are inseparable.

MAGGIE

I wonder.

HARRIET

Do have another cake.

MAGGIE

[*In relief*] Oh, yes.

[*Again her claws extend but do not touch the cake.*]

MARGARET

[*Takes cake delicately*] I really shouldn't—after my big luncheon. John took me to the Ritz and we are invited to the Bedford's for dinner—they have such a magnificent house near the drive—I really shouldn't, but the cakes are so good.

MAGGIE

Starving!

HARRIET

[*To Margaret*] More tea?

MAGGIE

Yes!

MARGARET

No, thank you. How wonderfully life has arranged itself for you. Wealth, position, a happy marriage, every opportunity to enjoy all pleasures; beauty, art—how happy you must be.

HETTY

[*In anguish*] Don't call me happy. I've never been happy since I gave up John. All these years without him—a future without him—no—no—I shall win him back—away from you—away from you—

HARRIET

[*Does not see Maggie pointing to cream and Margaret stealing some*] I sometimes think it is unfair for any one to be as happy as I am. Charles and I are just as much in love now as when we married. To me he is just the dearest man in the world.

MAGGIE

[*Passionately*] My John is. I love him so much I could die for him. I'm going through hunger and want to make him great and he loves me. He worships me!

MARGARET

[*Leisurely to Harriet*] I should like to meet Mr. Goodrich. Bring him to our studio. John has some sketches to show. Not many, because all the portraits have been purchased by the subjects. He gets as much as four thousand dollars now.

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] Don't pay that much.

HARRIET

[*To Margaret*] As much as that?

MARGARET

It is not really too much when one considers that John is in the foremost rank of artists to-day. A picture painted by him now will double and treble in value.

MAGGIE

It's a lie. He is growing weak with despair.

HARRIET

Does he paint all day long?

MAGGIE

No, he draws advertisements for our bread.

MARGARET

[*To Harriet*] When you and your husband come to se us, telephone first—

MAGGIE

Yes, so he can get the advertisements out of the way.

MARGARET

Otherwise you might arrive while he has a sitter, and John refuses to let me disturb him then.

HETTY

Make her ask for an order.

HARRIET

[*To Margaret*] Le Grange offered to paint me for a thousand.

MARGARET

Louis Le Grange's reputation isn't worth more than that.

HARRIET

Well, I've heard his work well mentioned.

MAGGIE

Yes, he is doing splendid work.

MARGARET

Oh, dear me, no. He is only praised by the masses. He is accepted not at all by artists themselves.

HETTY

[*Anxiously*] Must I really pay the full price?

HARRIET

Le Grange thought I would make a good subject.

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] Let her fish for it.

MARGARET

Of course you would. Why don't you let Le Grange paint you, if you *trust* him?

HETTY

She doesn't seem anxious to have John do it.

HARRIET

But if Le Grange isn't accepted by artists, it would be a waste of time to pose for him, wouldn't it?

MARGARET

Yes, I think it would.

MAGGIE

[*Passionately to Hetty across back of table*] Give us the order. John is so despondent he can't endure much longer. Help us! Help me! Save us!

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] Don't seem too eager.

HARRIET

And yet if he charges only a thousand one might consider it.

MARGARET

If you really wish to be painted, why don't you give a little more and have a portrait really worth while? John might be induced to do you for a little below his usual price considering that you used to be such good friends.

HETTY

[*In glee*] Hurrah!

HARRIET

[*Quietly to Margaret*] That's very nice of you to suggest—of course I don't know—

MAGGIE

[*In fear*] For God's sake, say yes.

MARGARET

[*Quietly to Harriet*] Of course, I don't know whether John would. He is very peculiar in these matters. He sets his value on his work and thinks it beneath him to discuss price.

HETTY

[*To Maggie*] You needn't try to make us feel small.

MARGARET

Still, I might quite delicately mention to him that inasmuch as you have many influential friends you would be very glad to—to—

MAGGIE

[*To Hetty*] Finish what I don't want to say.

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] Help her out.

HARRIET

Oh, yes, introductions will follow the exhibition of my portrait. No doubt I—

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] Be patronizing.

HARRIET

No doubt I shall be able to introduce your husband to his advantage.

MAGGIE

[*Relieved*] Saved.

MARGARET

If I find John in a propitious mood I shall take pleasure, for your sake, in telling him about your beauty. Just as you are sitting now would be a lovely pose.

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] We can go now.

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] Don't let her think she is doing us a favor.

HARRIET

It will give me pleasure to add my name to your husband's list of patronesses.

MAGGIE

[*Excitedly to Margaret*] Run home and tell John the good news.

MARGARET

[*Leisurely to Harriet*] I little guessed when I came for a pleasant chat about old times that it would develop into business arrangements. I had no idea, Harriet, that you had any intention of being painted. By Le Grange, too. Well, I came just in time to rescue you.

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] Run home and tell John. Hurry, hurry!

HETTY

[*To Harriet*] You managed the order very neatly. She doesn't suspect that you wanted it.

HARRIET

Now if I am not satisfied with my portrait I shall blame you, Margaret, dear. I am relying upon your opinion of John's talent.

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] She doesn't suspect what you came for. Run home and tell John!

HARRIET

You always had a brilliant mind, Margaret.

MARGARET

Ah, it is you who flatter, now.

MAGGIE

[*To Margaret*] You don't have to stay so long. Hurry home!

HARRIET

Ah, one does not flatter when one tells the truth.

MARGARET

[*Smiles*] I must be going or you will have me completely under your spell.

HETTY

[*Looks at clock*] Yes, do go. I have to dress for dinner.

HARRIET

[*To Margaret*] Oh, don't hurry.

MAGGIE

[*To Hettie*] I hate you!

MARGARET

[*To Harriet*] No, really I must, but I hope we shall see each other often at the studio. I find you so stimulating.

HETTY

[*To Maggie*] I hate you!

HARRIET

[*To Margaret*] It is indeed gratifying to find a kindred spirit.

MAGGIE

[*To Hetty*] I came for your gold.

MARGARET

[*To Harriet*] How delightful it is to know you again.

HETTY

[*To Maggie*] I am going to make you and your husband suffer.

HARRIET

My kinds regards to John.

MAGGIE

[*To Hetty*] He has forgotten all about you.

MARGARET

[*Rises*] He will be so happy to receive them.

HETTY

[*To Maggie*] I can hardly wait to talk to him again.

HARRIET

I shall wait, then, until you send me word?

MARGARET

[*Offering her hand*] I'll speak to John about it as soon as I can and tell you when to come.

[*Harriet takes Margaret's hand affectionately. Hetty and Maggie rush at each other, throw back their veils, and fling their speeches fiercely at each other.*]

HETTY

I love him—I love him—

MAGGIE

He's starving—I'm starving—

HETTY

I'm going to take him away from you—

MAGGIE

I want your money—and your influence.

HETTY and MAGGIE

I'm going to rob you—rob you.

[*There is a cymbal crash, the lights go out and come up again slowly, leaving only Margaret and Harriet visible.*]

MARGARET

[*Quietly to Harriet*] I've had such a delightful afternoon.

HARRIET

[*Offering her hand*] It has been a joy to see you.

MARGARET

[*Sweetly to Harriet*] Good-bye.

HARRIET

[*Sweetly to Margaret as she kisses her*] Good-bye, my dear.

CURTAIN

THE UNSEEN

A ONE-ACT PLAY

CHARACTERS

JEFFRY BALDWIN
LOIS (*his wife*)
HULDA (*a Swedish servant*)

COPYRIGHT, 1918, BY ALICE GERSTENBERG

First production at the Playshop Theatre at the Edgewater Beach Hotel, Chicago, under direction of Elisha Cook, August 26, 1918. Later produced at Grace Hickox Studios, Chicago, by Ypsilanti Players, Michigan, etc.

THE UNSEEN

SCENE: *A dining-room. Centre stands a table; Lois is seated at one end, Jeffry at the other.*

HULDA

[*Placing platter of chopped meat balls on table*] It vas not my fault! You say dees morning, Meeses Baldwin, you say—haf meat balls—dere meat balls—you no say soup!

LOIS

That will do, Hulda, that will do, we don't wish to hear another word about it.

HULDA

But I von't haf Meester Baldwin tink I wrong—You no say soup—dees morning—if you order soup, I make soup but—

JEFFRY

Stop it! Stop it!

HULDA

All de time—all de time—say keep down bills! I keep down bills—I cook only vat she say—she no say soup—

LOIS

But you know I meant to order soup—

HULDA

I can't smell vat you vant—I can't—

JEFFRY

That will do! Leave the room!

LOIS

Yes, didn't you cook anything else but meat? Haven't you any vegetables?

HULDA

Oh, you make me so mad! [*She goes out back centre muttering.*]

LOIS

Poor dear Jeffry,—are you awfully hungry? [*Serves meat.*]

JEFFRY

You'd better ship her right off. I can't work all day and come home to food like this—[*puts fork into meat*] hard as rocks!

LOIS

No one else will come for the small price we pay. We'll have to put up with her!

JEFFRY

Send her or lose me, take your choice!

LOIS

[*Teasingly*] Keep her or lose me—take *your* choice! I have a home and a mother.

JEFFRY

Well, if it's a case of your mother or keeping Hulda I think we'll keep Hulda.

HULDA

[*Enters with bowl*] Dees ees de ashpagus.

LOIS

Oh, yes, Jeffry, I bought some beautiful green asparagus for you! Why, Hulda, where are the heads?

HULDA

The vat? [*At Lois' left.*]

LOIS

Why! you've cut off all the heads!

HULDA

Yaas, dey looked too wrinkled.

LOIS

Oh, what's the use! Oh, you fool! You've cut off the best part!

JEFFRY

Didn't you ever cook asparagus before?

HULDA

Meester Baldwin, I advertise for general housework and for de cooking of potatoes and eggs and ven I cook vat she bring I cook to oblige—

JEFFRY

[*To Lois*] Why didn't you go into the kitchen yourself and show her? After all it is your job to look after things—you know jolly well, you've been slacking.

LOIS

To Mr. Baldwin's left, Hulda. When will you learn which is right and which is left?

HULDA

[*Looks dazed*] I vas dere for you—[*points to Lois' left*] so I come here.

LOIS

But my left is his right—go over there—

JEFFRY

Really, Lois, I think you might train her in the daytime when I'm not here.

LOIS

I've sewing to do and a lot of things! You have no idea how tired I get. I try in every way to save for you and help keep up appearances.

HULDA

[*To Jeffry who is having difficulty with the asparagus*] Take dem in your fingers, Meester Baldwin: dat's de way I hold dem in de kitchen.

LOIS

Hulda! You must not speak unless you're spoken to!

HULDA

[*Going out with dish*] Yaas, I no forget again. [*Exit.*]

LOIS

Oh, I'm exhausted.

JEFFRY

Poor brave little dear! I wish I could give you what other women have, pearls—

LOIS

It's all right, Jeffry, you would if you could. Anyway, we have our love.

HULDA

[*Enters with baked potatoes, which she passes to Jeffry's left*] Potatoes?

LOIS

You should pass them to me first, Hulda.

JEFFRY

[*Does not take any*] To Mrs. Baldwin first.

LOIS

[*As Hulda goes to her right side*] The other side, Hulda.

JEFFRY

Lois, I went to Appleton, Kennedy and Company this morning to ask about my designs.

LOIS

Oh, what did they say?

JEFFRY

They said they were waiting to hear the answer from the New York branch to-day. To-day the New York branch was to make the final decision between the three best designs. Here, Hulda, come back, I want a potato.

HULDA

[*Who was going out*] Vy I stood dere before—
[*She comes back dazed not understanding things at all. As she does so she tips the plate and a potato*

rolls on the floor. She scrambles after it, in doing so trips and falls full length, smashing the plate.]

LOIS

[*Begins to cry and laugh hysterically*] Oh, it's just too dreadful! My pretty plate!

JEFFRY

[*Helps Hulda up; sets her up like a waxen image, hands her the fragments of plate, keeps the potato, points her toward the door and pushes her on her way. She goes out automatically. Then he goes to pat Lois.*] Never mind, dear, luck's coming our way yet. They told me my design was one of the three they were considering. Mine is one of three!

LOIS

Oh, Jeffry! they will take yours! They must see that you are a great architect and only need your chance!

JEFFRY

There's a dear! You always do encourage me so! [*Kisses her, remembers baked potato in hand and goes back to his place to eat it.*]

LOIS

[*Goes to side-board and takes out a large blue-print which she unrolls triumphantly*] When I'm sewing I day dream about the city you have planned. Look at your blue-prints! Future generations in Western Canada will tell their children how the big railroad made clearings in the forest, how they sent all over the world for plans for the

building of a model city, and how Jeffry Baldwin, master architect, won the contest, built the city and became its first mayor!

JEFFRY

You don't stop at anything, do you?

LOIS

[*Spreads blue-print on table*] There is the Court House with your Honor's chair, and up here on the hill, in the very best location, is our new residence.

HULDA

[*Has come in to remove the plates. She takes Lois' plate and looks sideways at the blue-print.*]

JEFFRY

[*Pointing to print*] There's our garage for the car we have—not yet—

LOIS

Do you see the pretty curtains in my window?

HULDA

[*Thinks they are quite mad; she shakes her head as she can see no curtains; she piles up Jeffry's plates.*]

JEFFRY

There's the railroad station. I'm a little proud of that!

LOIS

It will make you famous!

JEFFRY

And rich!

LOIS

Hulda! Don't pile up the dishes like that! This is not a boarding house!

HULDA

Dat's all right, I am strong enough—I von't let dem drop! [*Exit.*]

JEFFRY

If I win the contest, I promise you some one better than Hulda; I'll send you to good dressmakers so you may save your own pretty fingers—

LOIS

And we'll go to the theatre oftener, Jeffry, entertain our friends more—Oh, how soon will they let you know if you have won?

JEFFRY

I should receive a telegram to-day.

LOIS

A telegram! To-day? Oh, Jeffry, I am sure they will send you one!

JEFFRY

In a way I wish I hadn't told you anything about it,—

HULDA

[*Brings in coffee and finger bowls.*]

LOIS

Where's the pie?

HULDA

You no order pie!

LOIS

I told you to telephone the bakery—

HULDA

No, you say you telephone the bakery—

LOIS

Yes, Hulda, for once you're right. I did forget it. Forgive me, Jeffry, I really didn't think of anything else but my new dress. I want to finish it for Sunday.

HULDA

[*Looks at Jeffry triumphantly*] You see, Meester Baldwin, I no to blame. [*Exit.*]

JEFFRY

Really, Lois, this is quite too much!

LOIS

I *am* ashamed of myself—

JEFFRY

I wish I hadn't told you about Appleton, Kennedy and Company. I feel as if telling you has spoiled my chances at winning!

LOIS

Jeffry, no!

JEFFRY

You scatter so! You don't concentrate! And I've been wishing for success so hard!

LOIS

So have I! Why, I've been praying for it and praying for it!

JEFFRY

Still, it seems to me as soon as we speak of our desires aloud, we start unseen forces in the air to work to thwart them! On the unseen side of life there must be uncanny influences helping or harming us. I feel as if telling you had hurt my chances!

LOIS

That's unfair of you! You know I wish you all the luck in the world!

JEFFRY

Is there such a thing as luck? Or are we only pawns in the power of unseen gods? I've been unlucky so long I scarcely dare to hope for success.

LOIS

Don't get blue! It must come right!

JEFFRY

Well, I've some drawings to make for the firm—a rush order—you don't mind, do you, if I clear everything off of the library table?

LOIS

Of course not. And I'm going to my room to sew my dress. You'll forgive me, won't you, for giving you such a dreadful dinner?

JEFFRY

[*Kisses her*] Of course, poor dear!

LOIS

I really do love you so, Jeffry.

JEFFRY

Not more than I do you.

LOIS

Now I *know* they've given you the prize. I feel it in my bones!

[*She laughs and goes out right. He goes out left.*]

HULDA

[*Enters from centre carrying a yellow telegram.*]

Dis telegram gust coom—

[*She is surprised that the room is empty.*]

Oh, I taught you ver still here.

[*The telephone down left rings. Hulda goes to answer it and before she gets there Lois calls from off right, "Hulda, Hulda." Hulda runs toward right to answer Lois but the telephone rings again and she runs back to it. Lois keeps on calling. Hulda vaccillates between Lois and the telephone and finally goes to the 'phone. As the telegram hampers her action with the 'phone she absentmindedly drops it on a side table littered with papers and promptly forgets all about it.*]

Halloo, vat you vant? Hold on.

LOIS

[*Off stage*] Hulda, Hulda, I can't find my thimble. What did you do with my thimble?

HULDA

Some von hold on to you.

LOIS

[*Enters*] Did you see my thimble?

HULDA

It roll under bed.

LOIS

Why didn't you pick it up?

HULDA

It vas time to make dinner.
[*Exit right.*]

LOIS

[*At 'phone*] Yes? Oh, Mrs. Nichols! Wait till I ask my husband. Jeffry, Jeffry—

JEFFRY

[*Enters from left*] Yes?

LOIS

[*Puts one hand over 'phone*] Mrs. Nichols invites us to dine on Tuesday, shall we accept?

JEFFRY

Yes, if you want to—

LOIS

But if they take your design you'll have to go right on to New York and—

JEFFRY

[*Cautiously*] Ssh! don't say anything about it. I haven't won yet.

LOIS

I'll accept; we can always call it off. [*In*

'phone] Oh, Mrs. Nichols, we shall be very happy to come. Tuesday at seven, yes, thank you.

JEFFRY

[*Goes left*] Don't disturb me again, please, dear.

LOIS

[*To Hulda who enters from right*] Did you find the thimble?

HULDA

Yaas, here.

[*Gives Lois thimble.*]

LOIS

[*Goes right*] Don't stay up too late, Jeffry!

HULDA

[*At table centre*] Does yous vant pie for breakfast?

LOIS

[*As she goes out right*] No!

JEFFRY

[*As he goes out left*] No!!!

HULDA

[*Clears the table of dishes, muttering to herself*] Vant pie, no vant pie—vant soup—no say soup—vant water—leetle in finger bowls—

[*She looks at the finger bowls scornfully and begins to wash the coffee cups in them.*]

Ven dey have running all day water in de bath tub.

[*She tries to recall the etiquette of service through pantomime.*]

I must bring potatoes to her on right side—no, not my right side—her left side—he take potato only ven I pass second time—over der, no, der, run here—run der—go out—coom in—go out—coom in—seven dollar a week—scrub—doost—seven dollar—get oop at six o'clock—all dark yet—Oh,—

[*She rattles off a paragraph of vituperative Swedish.*]

[*The lights go out to suggest the passing of a week.*]

[*They come on again to show Hulda setting the breakfast table. Lois in dressing gown and breakfast cap is helping her.*]

LOIS

[*Runs her finger over side-board.*] I do believe you haven't dusted this room all the week you've been here.

HULDA

I doost—

JEFFRY

[*Enters from back centre in dressing gown and carrying the morning newspapers soaked with rain.*] It's pouring out! How shall I dry the newspapers?

LOIS

Hulda, put them next to the stove. Come, Jeffry, have your breakfast.

HULDA

Put dem in de stove?

LOIS

No, not in the stove, next to the stove, over a chair like this!

HULDA

Huh!

[*She goes out back centre.*]

JEFFRY

Her week's up. Does she stay or go?

LOIS

[*Wearily*] I suppose she'll have to stay. I need some one and since there's no luck for us we shall have to keep on struggling the same old way. There's no use in *our* expecting great things!

JEFFRY

[*Disconsolately*] No use at all! I'm just a dub!

LOIS

Oh, it wasn't fair of them not to give you the prize, not even to send you any kind of word, no telegram, no letter, nothing! They haven't ever returned your designs!

JEFFRY

Oh, they'll send *those* back!

HULDA

[*Enters centre, places a jar of jam on table and begins to straighten up the room and dust, slowly working toward the small table littered with papers where she had placed the telegram a week ago.*]

LOIS

All our wishing and praying didn't help a bit! It's almost made an atheist of me!

JEFFRY

I knew I shouldn't have told you I was near winning. The witches in the air are mocking me for being too cock-sure!

LOIS

The man whose design they took doesn't look half as clever as you do. Look at his picture!

[*She takes it from the wall where it has been pinned.*]

Every day I've cut out the articles from the paper. "John Parker, winner of contest for building of model city, on the train going to Western Canada with the directors of the road." Oh, it should have been you, Jeffry! *You* should be on that train, you ought to be getting all this publicity. I wonder if the paper has something about them again this morning. Hulda, as soon as the paper is dry, bring it in—Hulda—did you hear what I said—Hulda,—answer me— [*Stamps her foot*] What is the matter with you?

HULDA

[*Meanwhile has been dusting and having reached the table and discovered the telegram, now shows facial expression running the gamut of surprise, fear, dumb astonishment. She holds the telegram out stupidly.*]

Dees come a veek ago.

JEFFRY

[*Snatches telegram*] A week ago?

LOIS

A telegram comes a week ago and you deliver it to us now—

HULDA

I veery sorry. It not stay in my head. You call me—telephone ring—you lose thimble—no pie—I forget—you no order soup—telephone ring—I go der—go here—I find now ven I doost—I—

JEFFRY

Can you imagine anything more outrageous! My future ruined—my hopes gone—all because of a numbskull like that!

LOIS

Let me see, let me see!

JEFFRY

[*Reads telegram in a rage*] "Jeffry Baldwin: Your plans for city accepted; must see you here at once for conference. Wire reply. If do not hear from you immediately, must favor other contestant who is with us now. Appleton, Kennedy & Co., New York City."

LOIS

[*Seizes telegram*] "Plans accepted—if do not hear from you immediately, must favor other contestant—"

JEFFRY

If do not hear from you immediately—a week late!

[*He turns on Hulda*] Do you know what you have done—Oh, I could—

[*He goes as if to strike her.*]

LOIS

Do you know what you've done—This telegram told Mr. Baldwin he was the winner of an important contest—that he was to answer at once—Oh, to have won and then lost because an outrageous fool like you—

JEFFRY

The success of a life-time—gone in a flash! For years I've studied, worked, slaved! I put my life blood into those designs—all my best hopes! to reach the goal! achievement! and then—like that—[*snaps his fingers*] gone!

HULDA

[*Frightened*] I veery sorry—

JEFFRY

You've killed something in me! D— you! It was murder!

HULDA

I not keel you—I not—

LOIS

Don't you know telegrams are sent to save time —how dared you hold it back!

HULDA

Telephone ring—you call—thimble—pie—soup —all same time—

LOIS

Get out or I'll strike you!

JEFFRY

Leave this house or I'll throw you out!

HULDA

You send me avay? But I forgot telegram—I not steal telegram—

LOIS

Get out, or I'll throw something at you!
[*Raises dish from table.*]

HULDA

[*Dodges out back centre.*]

LOIS

Oh, my poor Jeffry!
[*Goes to him.*]

JEFFRY

[*Flings Lois aside*] Don't touch me! It's *your* fault! I *told* you not to keep a girl like that! You will never listen to what I say! It's all your fault for not ordering the pie!

LOIS

The pie had nothing to do with it!

JEFFRY

What's a wife supposed to be to a man? Haven't your slack methods ruined my prospects for life?

LOIS

I haven't ruined your prospects! I've done my

best to skimp and slave to help you in every way. I only kept Hulda because *you* couldn't afford to pay any one else.

JEFFRY

We couldn't afford *her* that's certain! By this time I should have been on the train instead of Parker. I might have lost straight through—but this winning and then losing—what does it mean? There are mad devils in the air mocking me! [*Looks off into space*] D— you!

LOIS

Jeffry, you're not sane when you say such things! There's nothing in the air!

JEFFRY

How do you know our lives are not watched? How do you know but what the spirit of some dead enemy isn't taking revenge?

LOIS

That's horrible!

JEFFRY

How else can you explain my defeat? Don't I work hard? Am I not sober, honest and careful? Don't I deserve success? What's the matter with me? What have I done to fail?

LOIS

It's not *your* fault, Jeffry, it's just Fate against us!

JEFFRY

And what's Fate? A spirit hating me? An evil

spirit not wanting me to win, made Hulda purposely forget to give me the telegram! Is it fair to have to fight the spirits in the unseen? [*Shakes fist at goblins in air.*] I have strong hands to fight against flesh but I am powerless to fight the influences of the air!

LOIS

You're going crazy, be patient.

JEFFRY

Patient! I have waited long enough! I don't want success when I'm too old to enjoy it. I want it now while I've still red blood in my veins! I want it now! Do you hear me, you there in the Unseen. I demand success now!

LOIS

[*Sadly*] Perhaps, Jeffry, we must learn not to expect so much.

JEFFRY

That's the trouble with you. You never let me go on, you always hold me back—If you had dismissed Hulda as I told you to, this never would have happened. You hinder me at every turn—

LOIS

[*Indignantly*] Hinder you! Indeed! You're getting help from me all the time. I'm a fool to stay and endure it.

JEFFRY

You shouldn't have married me if you weren't willing to stand by me.

LOIS

You shouldn't have married me when you didn't have enough to support me.

JEFFRY

I wish I had known in time how extravagant you are.

LOIS

I'm not extravagant!

JEFFRY

You are!

LOIS

Do you want me to leave you?

JEFFRY

I'm sick of your threats.

LOIS

I'm sick of you!

JEFFRY

Then we're quits!

LOIS

You don't care for me!

JEFFRY

You certainly don't care for me!

LOIS

I do!

JEFFRY

You don't!

LOIS

I do. *You* don't!

JEFFRY

I *do!*

LOIS

You *don't!*

JEFFRY

I do. *You* don't!

LOIS

No, I don't! I'm going!

JEFFRY

[*Furiously*] All right, go on!

LOIS

[*Furiously; starts back centre*] Good-bye!

JEFFRY

Good-bye!

HULDA

[*Enters back centre and Lois has to retreat down stage; wears a ridiculous hat and shawl and carries a dilapidated suit-case and several weird hat-boxes. She holds out the dried newspapers. Lois seizes them.*]

The newspapers ees dry.

LOIS

Get out! I never want to see you again!

HULDA

[*Looks imploringly at Jeffry*] You vant me to go? You please geeve me vages? I haf noding but a nickel.

JEFFRY

Give you wages for ruining my life?

HULDA

Von veek—seven dollar—

JEFFRY

[*Flings money at her*] There! Get out!

HULDA

Tank you

[*She picks up money and boxes to go out centre.*]

LOIS

[*Meanwhile has come down stage left reading headlines of paper. She now shrieks*] Jeffry! Jeffry! Floods in Canada! Washed away a bridge! The train with the directors plunged into the river! Parker was *killed.*

JEFFRY

[*Down stage right*] Parker—killed—

LOIS

Jeffry, it might have been *you!*

JEFFRY

It might have been—

LOIS

You're saved!

JEFFRY

[*In startled realization that it was well that the telegram had not been delivered to him*] *Who* saved me?

LOIS

[*Half in awe to herself*] The telegram—

JEFFRY

[*In awe as he gazes out into space where before he had denounced the Unseen*] It must have been an *angel.*

LOIS

[*In wild delight*] It was Hulda!

HULDA

[*Turns stupidly*] Huh?

LOIS

Hulda, Hulda, come back! You've saved his life. You must stay with us forever!

[*Lois pulls her down stage so that she stands centre between Jeffry and Lois.*]

HULDA

Huh!

JEFFRY

[*Exultantly*] Hulda!

LOIS

[*Embracing her*] You saved his life!

JEFFRY

[*Patting her*] Hulda, *you* were the *angel!!!*

HULDA

[*Does not understand anything beyond the fact that they are friendly to her again. She looks straight ahead with an expression of happy stupidity and gives an idiotic giggle of delight.*]

CURTAIN

THE BUFFER

A ONE-ACT PLAY

CHARACTERS

HOMER WHITNEY
CLARA WHITNEY (*his wife*)
LOTTIE (*their child*)
DR. JIMMIE PIRIE
MRS. PAULA MATHEWS
ANNIE

First production at Grace Hickox Studios, Chicago, with "Lamb" Masters as "Lottie."

COPYRIGHTED, 1916, BY ALICE GERSTENBERG

THE BUFFER

SCENE: *Living room at the Whitneys'. Although well furnished and decorated the room lacks the feeling of "home." Clara, a woman of about 35 but looking older, is seated primly and is knitting monotonously.*

CLARA

There isn't any dust in here. I keep house better than that.

HOMER

[*A man of the same age but looking older, is taking sly glances at himself and his tie in a drawing room mirror.*] I didn't say there was. Stop clipping off my words. I said instead of fussing about housekeeping and sticking to that old wool you might try to *dance* because *I* like—

CLARA

[*Clipping off his words*] I can't see myself hopping along like a chicken! I was pretty enough when you married me.

HOMER

You're a hundred years behind the times! Have you ever tried to keep pace, have you ever tried to—

CLARA

Have you ever cared to understand me? Have you ever put yourself out—

HOMER

[*His hands to his ears*] Every day, every day, it's intolerable! What's the matter with that grate? Can't we keep a fire?

CLARA

[*Rises to put wood into grate.*]

HOMER

[*Rings bell*] I didn't ask you to build a fire. Why will you insist upon doing servant's work! Can't you learn to represent my wealth? Must you always show your origin? Look at your hands!

CLARA

My family's as good as yours. May be better. They've always been upright, self-respecting stock! A lot of fine airs you've a right to stick on when— [*She stops as maid enters.*]

HOMER

Annie, the hearth is cold.

ANNIE

[*Enters from right, gives Mr. and Mrs. Whitney a curious glance and goes to put another log on fire.*]

Ain't nothin' but ashes.

[*Clara resumes her knitting and Homer busies himself lighting a cigar but is peevish. He glances fastidiously at his finger nails. Annie knows they do not want to talk in her presence and it amuses her. Exit Annie with a backward glance.*]

CLARA

A lot of fine airs *you've* a right to stick on! I never did like your family—I don't know how I could ever have thought you good looking with that cut in your earlobe.

HOMER

[*Puts his hand instinctively to his ear. The cut is not visible.*]

No one notices it!

CLARA

I see nothing else. I've seen nothing else for years!

HOMER

[*Rudely*] Haven't you? Well, I haven't seen anything but your protruding tooth!

CLARA

[*Whose protruding tooth is not visible, puts her hand quickly to her mouth.*]

I had an admirer once who was fascinated by it!

HOMER

It's too bad he didn't let it captivate him for life!

CLARA

Oh! you beast!

[*She stops short as Annie parts portieres back centre and ushers in Dr. Jimmie Pirie, a good looking doctor.*]

ANNIE

Dr. Pirie.

HOMER

[*Attitude changing for company*] Hello, doc!

CLARA

[*Attitude changing for company*] Good afternoon, Dr. Pirie.

JIMMIE

Mrs. Whitney—Mr. Whitney. Which is my patient?

CLARA

I called you for Lottie.

HOMER

She had fever again.

JIMMIE

Another scare? She usually cools down before I get here.

CLARA

I'll send her in. She wouldn't go back to bed and I was afraid of exciting her too much by insisting.

[*Exit centre.*]

JIMMIE

Let me see her alone. She'll be less self-conscious.

HOMER

If you think her mother ought to go away with her into a different climate, don't be afraid to suggest it. I'll send them gladly.

JIMMIE

Oh! Would you?

HOMER

I'd miss them of course—Oh yes, [*he has another idea at the back of his head*] but—if you think that's the prescription—don't consider me.

JIMMIE

Right-O!

[*Lottie enters back centre. She is about twelve years old and adorable in every way. She gives a quick old-age guarded look at her father* (*this little glance is almost habitual with her*), *and then approaches Jimmie with all the sweetness of childhood.*]

LOTTIE

Oh! Doctor Jimmie!

JIMMIE

Hello! Lottie!

[*Homer goes out centre.*]

LOTTIE

Mother said you came to call on *me!*

JIMMIE

Right-O!—when a cavalier calls on a lady he's offered the most comfortable chair and asked to sit.

LOTTIE

[*Laughing*] But what's the lady going to do when there aren't any comfortable chairs?

JIMMIE

Not that green one?

LOTTIE

Try it!

JIMMIE

[*Does and sinks down uncomfortably.*] It kinks my spine!

LOTTIE

[*Laughs*] I don't like our house furnishing much. Mother says there isn't a cozy corner anywhere, but father said we had to leave it to the decorator. Father says he must have things proper so I guess we are. Have a lemon drop?

[*She offers one she has been holding in her left hand.*]

Do you mind if it's sticky?

JIMMIE

No, thanks! And don't take it yourself.

LOTTIE

I've only one. It wouldn't be polite for me to take it myself.

JIMMIE

[*Laughs*] Don't you know you have germs on your palm?

[*He takes out his handkerchief to wipe her sticky palm and while so distracting her attention, slips his finger to her pulse to count it.*]

LOTTIE

A gypsy told me I had my future in my palm. Is that a germ?

JIMMIE

[*Teasingly*] Well I guess the germs that are

there now might have something to do in determining your future. Got a lemon drop on your tongue?

LOTTIE

No.

JIMMIE

Oh! go on, yes you have!

LOTTIE

No, I haven't!

JIMMIE

I bet you have!

LOTTIE

Oh! you're smartie Doctor Jimmie! There!
[*She puts out her tongue.*]
I haven't!

JIMMIE

No you haven't. [*Bows low.*] I crave your pardon, your majesty. I am your most humble servant. You are in the best of condition!
[*He looks puzzled.*]

LOTTIE

[*After a pause*] What is it?

JIMMIE

[*Puzzled*] Whew! Yes! Well—I—Oh! by the way—I forgot—I brought you something!

LOTTIE

For me?

JIMMIE

Just outside the door! Seekers shall find!

LOTTIE

Oh! [*She dashes out centre.*]

JIMMIE

[*Walks up and down puzzled.*] Strange. Pulse all right—tongue—

[*He takes out his thermometer—slips it back again.*]

LOTTIE

[*Returns with a basket, her eyes aglow with curiosity.*] Shall I open it?

JIMMIE

Don't get scared!

LOTTIE

[*Hushed voiced*] What is it?

JIMMIE

[*Whispers*] Elephant!

LOTTIE

[*Opens basket and cries with delight as she pulls out an adorably ugly bull pup.*] Bull pup! Bull pup! Oh! you ugly darling! Oh! you darling! darling!

[*She hugs it to her most affectionately.*]

Oh! look at his teeth! Oh! isn't he ugly? Look at his cunning feet! Oh! you darling! I'm going to call you *Jimmie!*

JIMMIE

[*Watches her and is pleased.*]

LOTTIE

[*Realizing at last that thanks are due him*] You're so good to me! I'll kiss you!

JIMMIE

[*Accepts her kiss on his cheek in his best "uncle" manner.*] If that's my reward I'll bring you his brother next time.

LOTTIE

You know, sometimes, I think you buy pups and toys for me because you'd like to have them yourself only you're ashamed to be *not* grown up.

JIMMIE

Let me whisper in your ear. They think I'm grown up, they treat me with a lot of respect, but you've got the secret; I'm a kid!

LOTTIE

Well, sometime when you can't help buying will you give something to Angela next door instead of to me? She's kind of jealous.

JIMMIE

You bet I will! I'll buy two things and give one to you!

LOTTIE

Oh! no! you mustn't do that! You see if I got something too, it wouldn't give her a chance to make me jealous. I wouldn't really be jealous but I'd pretend to be just to make *her* feel happy!

JIMMIE

So if it makes her happy to try to make you

unhappy, you'd rather pretend to be unhappy than not to make her happy.

LOTTIE

[*Looking at him wonderingly and not quite understanding*] How fast you talk! If people were happy they wouldn't be mean or cross or angry, things would be lots better, wouldn't they?

JIMMIE

Lots better.

LOTTIE

Then it's wrong to be unhappy!

JIMMIE

Most decidedly wrong!

LOTTIE

Are people sick when they're unhappy?

JIMMIE

Yes, indeed!

LOTTIE

And are they well when they're happy?

JIMMIE

Pretty much!

LOTTIE

Then if all the world were happy nobody'd be sick?

JIMMIE

And where would I get my money from?

LOTTIE

[*Gravely*] Your money isn't half as important as the world's being happy!

JIMMIE

[*Takes out a cigarette. Offers her one.*] Have a cigarette?

[*She looks at him amazed. Jimmie laughs.*] Excuse me! Have this then!

[*He offers a thermometer.*]

LOTTIE

How you tease!

[*She "smokes" the thermometer cockily.*]

JIMMIE

[*Goes on talking to make her forget length of time she is holding thermometer.*] Once upon a time there lived a Prince who had been disappointed in the Princess he had chosen to marry. She married a king! And the Prince to forget his grief and the little children that were *not* to be born to him—turned to the flowers in his garden for comfort. And soon the flowers seemed to show him little faces, as if they were children—and he cared for them. Gave them good ground to grow in, rooted out the weeds, tended them for strong, long lives. One little flower he loved most of all!

LOTTIE

[*Takes thermometer out of her mouth.*] Poor Prince! I'd love him if it would make him *happy.*

[*Goes to give pup the thermometer.*] Here, Jimmie, have a puff!

JIMMIE

[*Seizes thermometer to save it.*] Here, here! [*He glances at it and puts it back into his case.*]

No place here to sterilize it! There's nothing wrong with you, kiddie! Feeling tip-top, aren't you? How do you sleep?

LOTTIE

[*Eyes him suspiciously*] You're not going to give me castor oil?

JIMMIE

[*Laughs*] Not this time!

LOTTIE

[*Looks about anxiously and comes closer*] Dr. Jimmie, I don't think mother's awfully well. [*Whispers*] Don't let her think you're watching her! But you give her something. She's—she's nervous. The city doesn't agree with her. She's always better and fatter when we're travelling. She and I always have lots of fun when we're away together! Couldn't you send us away?

JIMMIE

California?

LOTTIE

[*Claps hands*] Oh! yes! Watch father too. He needs medicine too. You know I love him awfully much but [*confidentially*] he's cross because he's sick. Sch!

[*She stops short as Mrs. Whitney enters.*]

Look at the pup Dr. Jimmie gave me!

CLARA

You are very kind, doctor.

JIMMIE

Amusing myself.

CLARA

Well?

JIMMIE

Would you care to take a trip, Oh! say—to California?

LOTTIE

[*Claps hands*] Oh yes, yes!

CLARA

[*Delighted*] You think we must go away, Lottie and I?

JIMMIE

A change of climate would do you both good.

LOTTIE

[*Hugging dog*] I'll take "Jimmie" with me! Oh! I must show him to Annie.

[*Hurries out right.*]

JIMMIE

[*Is glad that Lottie leaves them and approaches Mrs. Whitney in a more intimate manner.*]

And how are *you?* It is *always* a headache. What is the cause?

CLARA

[*Pretending to banter*] That is *your* headache, doctor.

JIMMIE

Of course *crying* smarts the eyes.

CLARA

[*Trying to change subject*] How about Lottie? What do you—

JIMMIE

Lottie's all right. I'm worried about *you*. Instead of putting out your tongue, will you smile for me?

CLARA

[*Embarrassed, smiles*] To order?

JIMMIE

[*Pleased*] That's it! You're very pretty when you smile.

CLARA

[*As if hurt*] *Once* I was!

JIMMIE

Now.

CLARA

[*Shakes her head, tears come to her eyes. She does not want to let him see she is near crying and therefore does not take out her handkerchief.*]

JIMMIE

[*Wiping her eyes with his handkerchief*] I know—some people love to be miserable, that's why they *stay* miserable so long! Why don't you love him?

CLARA

[*Staggered*] Oh!—Oh!—

JIMMIE

Come now, confess! He seems all right. I like

him. What is it? I must know. I can't prescribe for you unless I do. You *must* tell me! You *must*.

[*His use of authority pleases her. She responds to every word he says.*]

Come, come; what am I a doctor for if you can't tell me? Hate him?

CLARA

[*Nods her head.*]

JIMMIE

How much?

CLARA

[*Shivers.*]

JIMMIE

Ever been cruel to you?

CLARA

Only mentally.

JIMMIE

Rather good sort, generally speaking?

CLARA

Yes.

JIMMIE

But not for you.

CLARA

[*Shivers*] Every nerve shrinks.

JIMMIE

Constant association between antagonistic elements! And you stand it because of—

CLARA

Lottie.

JIMMIE

Yes. Well, I suppose that's not a point to argue, and you would reject my remedy.

CLARA

What do you advise?

JIMMIE

The knife.

CLARA

[*Starting*] Operation!

JIMMIE

The clean cut wound of divorce!

CLARA

Never!

JIMMIE

Better than an open sore.

CLARA

[*Proudly*] I am still strong enough to endure.

JIMMIE

You don't know how *ill* you are because you don't know how *well* you could be. Most of us never reach our best capacity.

CLARA

[*Sadly*] You are young, doctor, and full of energy.

JIMMIE

I'm older than you—38 to your 35—the reason

I look younger and feel younger is because *I've* never been crushed in matrimony.

CLARA

Have you never met any one you wanted to marry?

JIMMIE

[*Tenderly to her*] I have wanted very hard to bring smiles back into *your* eyes.

CLARA

[*Smiles with a flash of joy and stifles a gasp of surprise.*]

JIMMIE

Where you believe in outworn laws, man-made rules—I dispense with priest and State and go direct to the fountain head. I need no middleman to link me with God.

CLARA

[*Shocked but admiringly*] Atheist!

JIMMIE

I like to shock your mind, anything to break this deadly monotonous life of yours. I am an explorer. Your nature is rich in possibilities.

CLARA

[*Fascinated*] Is it? Is it really?

JIMMIE

[*Looking at her steadily*] There, that's the spirit I want to see grow in you! By Jove—you must have the book I finished reading this morn-

ing. It's a stirring plea for individualism. I'll go home now and get it for you.

CLARA

[*Eagerly*] Will you come back?

JIMMIE

On fifth speed— [*Starts out.*]

CLARA

[*Worried*] But how about Lottie—

JIMMIE

Oh! Lottie's all right! It's *you I'm* worrying about.

[*Exit centre.*]

[*He has dropped a glove. Clara picks it up quickly and thrilled to have it, hides it in her dress and hurries out right.*]

[*Mrs. Mathews enters centre. She is a good looking widow and fashionably dressed. She makes a careful entrance and is relieved and pleased when Mr. Whitney enters from left.*]

HOMER

Paula—

PAULA

The doctor let me in as he was going out.

HOMER

I was hoping all afternoon that you would come.

PAULA

I couldn't stay away.

HOMER

Paula, tell me,—does that annoy you?
[*Points to his ear.*]

PAULA

Does what annoy me?
[*She touches his ear.*]

HOMER

That cut in the earlobe, don't you hate it?

PAULA

I never noticed it.

HOMER

That's queer.

PAULA

That I love you?

HOMER

She hates this.

PAULA

Oh.

HOMER

You're sure you don't hate it, Paula?

PAULA

[*Laughs*] Boy! Mother's little boy! Must be petted, must be told he's handsome. Oh, Homer, my love isn't weighed so lightly. Are there about me features you dislike?

HOMER

[*Rises*] You know that I—
[*He goes as if to embrace her but controls him-*

self. They both stand a moment with eyes closed, trying to steady their emotions. She weakly finds her way to a chair and sinks into it.]

PAULA

[*With subdued emotion*] I must remember Lottie, I must remember Lottie.

HOMER

Forgive me.

PAULA

[*Simply*] There is nothing to forgive. I wanted to be taken into your arms just as much as you wanted to have me.

HOMER

Can you suffer as much as I?

PAULA

More, more! I have the agony too, of watching from my window how you come out of this house in the morning and go into it at night and I see you with your head bowed. There is no vitality in your step, no joy. You are a man only half alive!

HOMER

I am caught in the tangles I made for myself.

PAULA

Surely, surely there is wrong in circumstances that cripple the soul. The sun was made for us all! It cannot be right, it is not right that you live in shadow!

HOMER

Show me a clean way to the sun, Paula.

PAULA

I could bring out what is best in you! You are crippled here! This house under these conditions, do not let you be the man you really are. Oh, sometimes it is unbearable!

HOMER

[*Kindly*] Tell me, Paula—do you ever think of him and forget me?

PAULA

[*Simply*] I loved him when he married me—later we grew apart. When he died we were almost strangers. I am not a widow at heart, Homer. If you were free—I could be young again. Oh!—Mrs. Whitney—

CLARA

[*Enters from right*] Good afternoon—Mrs. Mathews. I'm glad to see you.

PAULA

[*Explaining her presence*] I came over expressly to invite you to a luncheon I'm planning to have in two weeks. That big, old house of mine is yearning for company again. [*Sits.*]

CLARA

[*Sits*] I doubt if I shall be here, that is, if Mr. Whitney permits me to follow the doctor's instructions and take Lottie to California. The doctor wants us to go away, Homer.

HOMER

You know very well, Clara—that I am always ready to do all I can. He is a very excellent doctor. [*Sits.*]

CLARA

I thought we'd leave soon?

PAULA

[*Kindly*] Who is going to one-step with your husband—while you are away?

CLARA

[*Kindly*] I leave him to your kindness.

PAULA

Ah! but I can't be risking my reputation by being seen too often with another woman's husband. Remember how widows are watched!

CLARA

[*Laughing and without suspicion*] Aren't you safe?

[*There is an unexpected pause. Homer grows anxious, Clara looks puzzled.*]

PAULA

[*Rises.*] [*Soberly*] No.

[*Homer and Clara look at Paula.*]

CLARA

[*Rises*] No?

PAULA

I love your husband.

[*Homer and Clara, shocked by surprise at her daring, do not know what to say. Paula continues*

as if it were an effort] It is safer for me if you do *not* go.

[*There is a pause.*]

CLARA

And he—cares for you?

PAULA

How can *I* answer that?

CLARA

[*Looks at Homer*] You?

HOMER

Yes.

CLARA

[*Puzzled*] You actually—*love* him?

PAULA

Yes.

CLARA

[*Shudders*] For how long?

PAULA

A year, since I met both of you at the Raleigh dinner.

CLARA

[*To Homer*] How did it start?

HOMER

I drank too much that night—

CLARA

[*Bitterly*] As usual.

HOMER

[*Bitterly*] I drink to forget—

PAULA

[*Defendingly*] He would never have started—[*But she stops, embarrassed by Clara's resentful eyes.*]

CLARA

Go on.

HOMER

I drank too much that night and talked too much—

CLARA

[*Resenting*] Publishing aloud the secrets of our life!

PAULA

Fortunately to *me!*

CLARA

[*Shudders*] Oh! to have him talk—about—us—about me! Is it not enough—

PAULA

[*Interrupting*] It has remained my secret. But *having* once heard there arose between us sympathy and friendship.

CLARA

[*Coldly*] How far?

PAULA

[*Rises, tense*] *Not*—far.

HOMER

[*Tensely*] *That* you *must* believe.

CLARA

[*Shrugs her shoulders*] I'm glad you've told me.

I like honesty. I'm sorry for you both. Come as often as you like, Paula, I may call you Paula, now, may I not? I'd better, at any rate, to save appearances. For we *must* save appearances. Be careful of appearances while I am away. [*She breathes freely*] It's rather good news. I'm relieved. Now that Homer has the truth off his chest he may be more comfortable to have around the house. Shall I ring for some wine to celebrate?

HOMER

[*Relieved*] That's bully of you, Clara

CLARA

I never suspected it.

HOMER

I was afraid you'd raise an awful row.

PAULA

[*Prevents Clara from ringing bell for maid.*]
[*Paula is torn with emotion.*]
One moment! How can you stand there, both of you, talking in ice-cold tones! Wine to celebrate what? The telling of the truth? Our talk has just begun! What are you going to do *now?*

CLARA

Do?

HOMER

Now?

PAULA

[*To Clara*] You are lenient, but with me it must be all or nothing. I have suffered tortures this past year. You must divorce him!

CLARA

I cannot divorce him.

PAULA

Is there no legal cause?

CLARA

I have a child.

PAULA

That is no answer.

CLARA

It is *the* answer.

PAULA

You don't *want* him, do you?

CLARA

[*Shivers*] No.

PAULA

Look at him, getting gray before his time, look at yourself, aging as rapidly. Look at me fighting to keep youth! If the three of us could express joy—

CLARA

Our duty is of more importance than our joy.

PAULA

What is your duty? Giving him happiness? Giving me happiness? Giving yourself happiness? Or sacrificing us all for Lottie?

CLARA

[*Pushes her off as if unable to keep her self*

control] If I suffer it does not count in the scheme of things! I am a mother! That's all I amount to in eternity!

PAULA

[*In despair*] Homer, have you nothing to say? Can you stand by without a word to help me?

HOMER

[*Tenderly*] Dear Paula, I, too, feel my responsibility. It is the one thing upon which Clara and I agree.

PAULA

You've said so and yet I've always felt you could not mean it, really, if it came to the point. [*She sways a little.*] Then you do not care enough for me! [*Passionately*] If you cared enough you'd break *any* bond!

HOMER

[*Kindly*] You wouldn't want me to be weak even for love.

PAULA

[*Pause of suffering*] Then I must go. [*She holds out her hand to him.*]

HOMER

[*Not taking it*] No, no!—we can see each other. Clara will permit it—

PAULA

[*In scorn, as she drops her hand*] Is there honor in that? And what will it lead to? I haven't been able to crush a desire to live as you two have done!

I resent abnormal conditions! I won't stupefy my abilities by perverted reasoning! We are a long time dead—while we are here we are here to live and if we shun living we are nothing but cowards—[*To Clara*] You are afraid to throw off your shackles— [*To Homer*] You do not dare be yourself!—You don't know how to love!

HOMER

[*Stirred*] You want only your own happiness. I am annihilating mine for Lottie!

CLARA

[*Stirred*] You don't understand the suffocation of sacrifice!

PAULA

[*Emotionally moved*] I understand it only too well. I am beating my hands against the absurdity of it! and it's a stone wall—bruising me! You are stone! stone!

[*Her clenched hands express rebellion but she goes out in despair.*]

HOMER

Paula!

CLARA

[*Standing in his way*] Don't go! She'll find her way out.

HOMER

She should have been my wife.

CLARA

I don't doubt she ought to be.

HOMER

Curse your evil mind! That's wretched slander!

CLARA

How do I know?

LOTTIE

[*Appears in doorway right*] Mother! Father!

HOMER

Go upstairs—Lottie—

LOTTIE

Don't begin it again! [*In half whisper which they are too excited to notice.*]

CLARA

[*To Homer*] How do I know?

HOMER

It is outrageous of you even to imagine—

LOTTIE

[*Sidesteps, as if to guard her mother against her father*] Father says things he doesn't mean when he's excited.

HOMER

[*Ignoring Lottie*] If you had any wits and weren't a dull old woman you might—

CLARA

Who's broken my life, who's beaten me into what I am—who's—

LOTTIE

[*Sidesteps as if to guard her father against her*

mother] Oh! you mustn't say that! Father's never hit you—never—never—

HOMER

You'll drive me to it some day.

LOTTIE

[*Scared*] Oh! no!—

CLARA

I've suffered enough to know—

LOTTIE

But he's never hit you—O please mother—don't say hard things. Oh please father don't say—

HOMER

[*Ignores Lottie, goes as if to strike Clara, but restrains himself and only flings her aside and goes out left.*]

LOTTIE

Mother, what is it? What can I do? What does father want? Why is he angry with you again? Did you forget again? Is it because you have on the brown dress he doesn't like? Is it wrong to like bright colors? We like red and pink—I don't want to be rude, mother dear—but I think you look prettier too in other dresses—don't you think he'd feel better if you tried sometimes to wear what he likes and—

CLARA

When I've done everything for you, Lottie—to think that you can turn against me, your own mother.

LOTTIE

[*In tears*] But I'm not turning against you!

CLARA

[*Pushing Lottie away*] It's in your heart, in your thoughts, no, go away, I'm too hurt—

LOTTIE

[*In terrified anguish*] Mother, I love you, I love you! You don't understand.

CLARA

I understand perfectly well!

[*She coldly turns and goes out right.*]

LOTTIE

Mother, mother, please mother! I didn't mean anything!

[*She weeps bitterly, unable to grasp the turn of events, feeling desolate, abandoned, misunderstood. Finally one consolation seems to be left. She throws herself upon her knees in weeping prayer.*]

Our Father who art in Heaven, I have hurt my darling mother; oh, please make my mother love me again. Oh, please show her how to love me again! My mother and my father don't love each other any more. I try to help them; I try, but I don't know what to do. Nothing helps. Oh, look down upon us and show us the way! Oh, I'll be so good, I'll never break any of Thy commandments; I'll give to the poor everything I can save, if only you make my father and my mother love each other again. Oh, be merciful; be merci—

[*She sobs to exhaustion.*]

HOMER

[*Enters from left. Tenderly*] Who's crying? —What's the matter?

LOTTIE

[*Rushes to him*] Oh, please love mother again!

HOMER

[*Kindly*] Look here, Lottie, that's none of your business!

LOTTIE

Please get rid of this terrible thing that hurts us!

HOMER

So you're at it, too, are you? Some of her confounded meddling! Poisoning my own daughter's mind against me!

LOTTIE

But, father, you don't understand; I don't want to hurt you, I love you; I—

HOMER

I will not have my child sitting in judgment upon me! I won't have it!

LOTTIE

But because I love you, I do love you so, I don't know how to say it, but I—

HOMER

She is poisoning your mind, your mind against me. Ruining your disposition. Stubbornness! Stubbornness! I won't have it! I won't have it!

[*He brushes Lottie aside and goes out centre.*]

LOTTIE

[*Remains dazed, like a beaten little animal unable to understand the world of grown-ups in which it lives.*]

ANNIE

[*Enters from right*] Fighting again?

LOTTIE

[*Does not answer.*]

ANNIE

[*Kindly*] Oh! *you* won't tell me. You're a little old woman! Gee, but I'm sorry for some of you kids. I seen a lot like you in other houses.

LOTTIE

[*Hot with excitement, despair, hurt pride.*] You mustn't talk like that, Annie.

ANNIE

[*Amused*] Do you think cook and Lawson and Mary and Tim and me don't *see* what's going on? Huh! When there's cat and dog upstairs, there's h—ll all along the line!

LOTTIE

[*Hysterical*] Annie! That isn't nice!

ANNIE

I bet you get a fever now—Oh! Dr. Jimmie, you can catch it now—she's as hot as fire—

JIMMIE

[*Enters centre, throws book on table, feels Lottie's head*] By Jove we have caught it this time. You're going straight to bed.

LOTTIE

[*Throws herself at him as if in need of protection*] Oh! Dr. Jimmie—take me away! take me away! [*Clinging to him*] I can't stand it any more—I can't stand it!

JIMMIE

[*Frightened*] My child!

LOTTIE

I wanted to run away. I didn't know where. You've come just in time—

JIMMIE

To bed you'll go!

LOTTIE

No, no—no!

JIMMIE

Come, come, Lottie—you're talking nonsense.

LOTTIE

Oh! please, take me away. They don't love me—they don't—

JIMMIE

When we have fever we say things we don't mean. Now I'll carry you upstairs and put you to bed and tell you stories and— [*He picks her up gently and firmly and starts to door, centre.*]

LOTTIE

[*Screams piercingly and fights him like a little tigress*] Let me go! Let me go! Let me go!

[*Clara and Homer hurry in from right and centre.*]

CLARA and HOMER

Lottie! Lottie!

LOTTIE

[*To Jimmie*] No, they don't love me any more! I feel it! I feel it all here [*she writhes and puts her hand to the nape of her neck where nerves get congested*] and it hurts so! I cry all night long—and I pray, but it doesn't help. They hate each other. I can't remember it's ever being different. Once she wouldn't talk for three days and he got so angry he threw a chair at her.

CLARA

[*Surprised*] She can't know that—

LOTTIE

Oh! yes I do—

HOMER

[*Surprised*] Why, she was only four—

LOTTIE

[*Hysterically*] Oh! I remember! The chair hit a glass bowl and smashed it and mother cried because it was a wedding present and she cried all night. I knocked on her door and begged her to let me in, but she wouldn't let me in. And nurse put me to bed but I didn't sleep! I was frightened. I loved them both. I love them both, but I hate them when they're together. Take me away, Dr. Jimmie—I can't stand it when they're together! I can't stand it! Please take me away! [*Cries bitterly.*]

HOMER

[*Groans*] You want to leave us, Lottie?

CLARA

You're not happy—Lottie?

LOTTIE

Let me go! Let me go!

JIMMIE

She's raving!

LOTTIE

I won't be put to bed—I won't—I won't!

HOMER

Stop screaming, Lottie—my dear—

CLARA

My darling!

LOTTIE

Go away! You don't love me any more. You hate each other! You hate each other!

CLARA, HOMER and JIMMIE

Lottie!

LOTTIE

[*Hysterically*] They hate each other; Mother loves me when I'm with her and father loves me when I'm with him, but when they're both together they don't love me! Oh, take me away—Dr. Jimmie—take me away. [*Clings to him desperately.*]

CLARA and HOMER

Lottie!

LOTTIE

[*Continuing*] Oh, please Dr. Jimmie, make them happy for my sake; make them HAPPY for MY sake!

CURTAIN

"ATTUNED"

A ONE-ACT PLAY

CHARACTER

GRACE, *the wife who loves him*

First production at Grace Hickox Studios.

COPYRIGHT, 1918, BY ALICE GERSTENBERG

"ATTUNED"

SCENE: *Grace's room. Grace in a negligee of soft blue is discovered at her writing-table, down left, busily writing. The room is dark save for the lamp on the table.*

GRACE

[*Reading what she has written*] My dear, dear Tom, dear beloved husband—that's three dears but I could write thousands, one for every mile that separates us. Are you cold this chill autumn night? Are you in a front trench to-night? [*She rises to get his photograph, to look at it long and earnestly as if expecting the photograph to speak.*]

Where are you to-night, dear? Can't you tell me? I feel so alone without you—and yet, sometimes at night before I go to sleep I feel as if I could put my hand out and touch you. The power of our love carries across land and sea. I love you, Tom, with a love as limitless as the sky of Heaven. Our love has been like the magnet and the needle, and our harmony complete. [*She walks about.*]

If I listen very quietly and think of you way over there fighting, in danger, but brave, I feel sometimes as if I really heard you talking to me—as if by mental wireless. If two instruments can be so attuned to transmit messages through space

—surely two souls—could be as powerful—yes, it must be so. [*She goes back to the letter and writes.*]

You must have been thinking of me all day—or rather what is *my* day was *your* last night. It is *day* with *you* now—all *your* night, then, you have thought of me—all *my* day I have felt your eyes following me,—sending me beautiful thoughts of love—I found myself smiling—mother asked me what about—I couldn't tell—I really didn't know—but of course it must have been your love like rays of sunshine blessing me—why did you think of me all last night—[*She stops writing and asks demandingly.*]

Tom, why did you think of me all last night? [*She rises.*]

Answer me! Were you a sentry on duty—not allowed to sleep? Did you have to think of me to keep yourself awake? Can't you hear me ask you that question? Answer me! He does not answer! He is not thinking of me—[*She is disappointed and begins to puzzle the answer for herself.*]

Were you wounded—or perhaps in pain—or—[*she is afraid of her next thought*] or did they tell you, you were to go over the top *to-day?* No, no, I must not imagine things—I must keep myself calm, and wise and brave—[*She goes back to her writing.*]

I am not the only one missing my beloved—there are thousands of others missing theirs—I should have had a letter from you to-day—your last special delivery letter woke the whole household up

at midnight—it is so strange to be living at home again—when I think of our little apartment and how happy we were—

[*She goes on writing. While she is writing a part of the back drop opens revealing Tom in uniform on a distant battle-field. There is the sound of distant rumbling of artillery and all the noise of battle intensified by red flashes, flare-lights, smoke and so forth. Tom pantomimes a charge forward and falls mortally wounded. The back drop closes silently. Grace has neither seen nor heard the action at back, but now she starts up staring straight ahead with horror-stricken eyes, and shrieks.*]

GRACE

Tom! Tom! He's *dead!* [*She revolts at the idea.*]

No! No! It's not true! Not so soon! He's only been over a few months! You couldn't take him from me so soon! You have no right to take him so soon! What do *I* care what they're fighting for over there—they've no right to come into my house and rob me of all that life was worth living for! The sacrifice asked of me is too great. You have taken my husband from me! But I defy you, I defy the injustice of it! [*She begins to wilt.*]

But it is true. I know it. He called to me. He is dead. Oh, Tom, you were so young and strong; I am so young. There will be so many years for me to miss you. Never to see you again. So many years for me alone—Oh, the long bitter nights—the endless days—I shall never be happy

again—I shall never smile again—the light has left my life forever!

[*A mystical light appears and slowly Grace becomes conscious of a presence.*]

GRACE

[*Very slowly comes to a realization of her feeling and whispers in an awed voice.*] Tom—no, dear, I am not afraid—if it's really you.—Oh, can it be true?—you're not really gone forever—what, dear? I can't understand what you are trying to tell me—yes, I'll listen—but I can't help the beating of my heart—I'll try to be calm and very still—I suppose it is simple if one understands, but I can't understand you very well.

I see a strange light, I feel your personality—but it is so strange not to be able to touch you—Yes, I'll come closer—I am not afraid—it's wonderful to know that you are near—Oh, I wish I were dead, too—it would be so much easier for both of us—

It is not my time yet? How long must I wait? There are reasons why I should stay on earth and suffer—it is part of the great scheme for the progress of my soul?

I shall weep the rest of my life—but I cannot help weeping—you are dead on a battlefield thousands of miles away—yes, I know, but I miss your arms about me—what could be greater than the love of your spirit guiding me?—yes, that's true—the soul has bridged time and distance and come straight to me—yet I shall weep for the warmth

of your arms—and for the dear body so cold on the battlefield—[*She starts.*]

Did you say it was a joke? What is a joke? A Divine jest? That all the fire and steel of war cannot really kill? That war cannot kill? The soul rises triumphant? Everyone weeps for your loss—and you aren't lost? The soul is deathless and eternal? But if war does not kill, why do we have war? To what?—I didn't understand you—Oh, it is only a game to test souls—to evolve great principles—you don't mind having given up your body for them? They count so much in the great Answer?

But it is so hard to be patient—I can't help crying—why is it selfish and cruel to you if I cry?—my crying is a magnet of sadness that weighs upon you—and holds you back—but why do you want to leave me—It's a fascinating country there—with amazingly interesting things?—no, you didn't say *things*,—I don't understand your language—like what—Oh, yes, revealed truths and beautiful thoughts—and marvelous minds to teach you—but if I try to smile and be happy and not keep you by making you sad, will you promise to wait there for me? Will you help me through when it is my time to come? There is a wonderful garden beyond with flowers like blossoms of knowledge—Oh, Death, then, must be very beautiful! Yes, dear—I am listening—I shall be very lonely—but I understand—and my heart is at peace—your love has spoken to me—your love is the voice of your soul in eternity. I shall be brave, Tom,—

I shall not weep! I shall let you go ahead a little —yes, dear, good-bye—not good-bye?—then just —good-night—

[*The light vanishes. There is a loud knocking at the door. A man's voice off stage down left calls "Grace."*]

GRACE

Yes, father—[*She goes to the door quickly, opens it, receives a letter.*]

VOICE

Another special delivery—from Tom, I guess—they always get me out of bed—and I'm so sleepy.

GRACE

[*Closes door, tears letter open and reads*] "Tomorrow we go to the front again. I feel it is my last stay in the trenches. Perhaps by the time you receive this it will be over—but I am convinced that the soul survives the destruction of the body—and if it does I shall come straight to you—."

CURTAIN

THE POT BOILER

A ONE ACT SATIRE

THE POT BOILER

CAST

THOMAS PINIKLES SUD, *the author*
HAROLD WOULDBY, *the novice*
MR. IVORY, *the father*
MR. RULER, *the hero*
MISS IVORY, *the heroine*
MR. INKWELL, *the villain*
MRS. PENCIL, *the vampire*

First production at the Player's Workshop, East 57th Street, Chicago, November 20, 1916. Direction Elizabeth Bingham. Later produced by the Theatre Workshop, New York; Arthur Maitland Theatre, San Francisco; Hollywood Community Theatre, Hollywood, California; in the cantonments of the United States, in a trench in France, in Hawaii, in vaudeville, etc. Published by Stewart & Kidd Co. in a volume of "Fifty Contemporary One Act Plays" of the world, compiled by Shay and Loving. In vaudeville the play was shortened to five players, Sud assumed the part of Ivory himself and addressed his remarks to the audience instead of to Wouldby.

COPYRIGHTED, 1916, BY ALICE GERSTENBERG

THE POT BOILER

SCENE: *A stage only half set for a morning rehearsal and dimly lighted.*

SUD

[*A successful playwright, enters in a hurry carrying a leather bag full of manuscripts.*]

STAGEHAND

[*Off stage*] Good morning, Mr. Sud.

SUD

Good morning, Gus. Just set two doors, that'll be all I'll need this morning. We're rehearsing for lines. [*Steps down stage and calls front.*] Joe, I'm expecting a young man; it's all right, let him in.

WOULDBY

[*From auditorium, back*] I'm here now, Mr. Sud.

SUD

Come up, Mr. Wouldby. Some more border lights, please.

WOULDBY

It's very good of you to let me in.

SUD

I was fond of your father. I am glad to see his son.

WOULDBY

I have written a play, too.

SUD

Too bad, too bad, you make the price of paper go up.

WOULDBY

It must be wonderful to be the master playwright of our day. Everybody knows Mr. Thomas Pinikles Sud.

SUD

[*Setting stage*] Yes, it is a privilege to be a friend of mine.

WOULDBY

[*Pursuing Sud*] Will you read my manuscript, sir?

SUD

Never roll a manuscript. I see very well you don't even know the first principles.

WOULDBY

How can I learn the first principles? No one will tell me.

SUD

Wait, I shall do a great thing for you; let you stay and see a dress rehearsal of my latest play, "The Pot Boiler." In it I have used all dramatic principles.

WOULDBY

What are they?

SUD

Well, for instance, this pencil is the woman in the case.

WOULDBY

Pencil.

SUD

This inkwell is the villain, altho' that's really too dark for him. Deep-dyed villains are out of fashion.

WOULDBY

Inkwell.

SUD

The heroine is Miss Ivory, paper cutter.

WOULDBY

Ivory.

SUD

Mr. Ruler is the hero.

WOULDBY

Ruler.

SUD

[*Other characters enter from stage door*] I haven't finished writing it, but we're going through it this morning as far as I have written, then I shall see how to go on. Here are the players now. Line up, please, and let me see your costumes. [*Sud studies them.*] That's nice, Miss Ivory, nice and white, but, Mrs. Pencil, what do you mean by wearing an evening gown!

MRS. PENCIL

A vampire always wears a vampish gown.

SUD

But it is afternoon; I wrote tea time, not dinner.

MRS. PENCIL

One always wears evening gowns—in all the smart productions I've been in—

SUD

That will do, I'll speak to you after rehearsal—Mr. Ruler, no red tie?

RULER

[*Changes blue tie for red*] All right, sir.

SUD

Inkwell, you are the villain but I didn't say pirate. You are much too black.

INKWELL

You want me to go light on the dark stuff? All right, I got you.

SUD

[*Clapping his hands*] Now to work—to work, clear the stage! [*Mrs. Pencil and Ruler go out left. Mr. and Miss Ivory and Inkwell go out right; that is, they hide behind the piled up scenery of the open stage.*] Go down and take an orchestra seat, Mr. Wouldby. [*Wouldby does so.*] You must imagine that this room is the library in Mr. Ivory's house. [*Sud claps his hands and goes downstairs to orchestra aisle.*] Ready.

[*There is a pause, then the door up left opens and Mrs. Pencil comes in; her pantomime is as Sud explains it to Wouldby.*]

SUD

[*In stage whisper to Wouldby*] The adventuress

—she comes in—she has been out—she is worried —That nervous twitching of lips—and narrowing of eyes, are always full of suspense—she takes off her gloves, her hat—that's good business. A door opens—she starts—by starting she shows you she is guilty of something—

MISS IVORY

[*Without hat or gloves enters from right*] Oh, there you are, Mrs. Pencil.

MRS. PENCIL

Yes, I'm back.

MISS IVORY

I thought I should have to drink my tea without you.

[*They sit down to tea—Miss Ivory back of table, centre. Mrs. Pencil left of table.*]

SUD

[*In stage whisper to Wouldby*] That tells the audience what time of the day it is; besides, drinking afternoon tea shows Miss Ivory is in society.

MRS. PENCIL

Isn't your father going to join us?

SUD

[*Aside*] That's merely to show the girl has a father.

MISS IVORY

No, he is talking business with Mr. Inkwell.

MRS. PENCIL

[*Starting*] Inkwell.

MISS IVORY

Yes, do you know him?

MRS. PENCIL

[*Evasively*] I, Oh—No—

SUD

She's lying. A vampire always knows the villain.

MRS. PENCIL

No—no—

SUD

[*Aside*] Do you catch it? Do you see how her nervousness suggests that there is a link between Mrs. Pencil and Inkwell? That's where I show my technique.

WOULDBY

[*Scratching his head*] Technique. How can I learn it?

SUD

It is the secret that every playwright locks in his breast. Keep the young ones out. *Mum* is the word.

MISS IVORY

I am so sorry father has all this trouble with the bricklayers. They shouldn't have gone on a strike—just now—when you are visiting us.

SUD

[*To Wouldby*] That tells that Mrs. Pencil is a guest in Miss Ivory's house.

MISS IVORY

When you were here last year my mother—

SUD

[*Aside*] The girl hesitates—they both look sorrowful; we had to cut down on the cast, so I killed off her mother.

MRS. PENCIL

[*Sadly, with a foreign accent*] Ah, my dear—we were such close friends—since my arrival in this country—

SUD

[*Aside*] You see I had to make her a foreigner. A vampire always talks with a foreign accent.

MRS. PENCIL

I haven't had much time to read particulars about the strike. Does your father still refuse to arbitrate?

MISS IVORY

[*Haughtily*] What right have bricklayers to make rules for my father? He would show his weakness if he gave in—I have—faith that what he does is right.

SUD

[*To Wouldby*] The innocent heroine so cool and pure and white.

[*The right door opens and Inkwell enters—he starts as he sees Mrs. Pencil; there is a straight look of recognition between them which Miss Ivory does not see.*]

SUD

[*Aside*] That's a dramatic scene. Doesn't it thrill your spine?

MISS IVORY

Mrs. Pencil, may I introduce Mr. Inkwell—[*Inkwell and Mrs. Pencil bow slightly.*] Will you have a dish of tea?

SUD

Cup, cup of tea.

MISS IVORY

[*Walks down stage to front*] Dish, *dish* of tea!

SUD

[*In orchestra pit*] *Cup!* I wrote CUP!

MISS IVORY

[*Temperamentally*] Mr. Sud, last year when I was in England the Duke of Creighton himself offered me a *dish* of tea.

SUD

I don't care a damn about the Duke—I wrote *cup!*

MISS IVORY

Mr. Sud, I'm used to playing the *smartest* parts. It's *dish*—it's dish! or I *quit!* which is it?

SUD

No more temperament, please! Say anything you like! I suggest bathtub!

MISS IVORY

Mr. Inkwell, will you have a dish of tea, and please tell me that you have ordered the strikers to come to father's terms?

INKWELL

[*At right of table*] He is looking through his safe for more papers, so he asked me to wait in here.

SUD

That's an explanation why he came in.

MISS IVORY

[*Offering cup*] How many lumps?

SUD

[*Aside to Wouldby*] That question of the number of lumps is very important; it gives a natural air to the scene.

MISS IVORY

I am going to the dining-room to get some arrack for your tea.

SUD

[*To Wouldby*] That's only to show the father has a supply.

INKWELL

[*Nervously*] Oh, please don't trouble—

MISS IVORY

No trouble at all. [*Exit right.*]

SUD

When you want to get a character out, you've got to get 'em out.

INKWELL

[*At right of table, to Mrs. Pencil*] You here?

MRS. PENCIL

[*At left of table*] Sch! I had to come. I couldn't live without you any longer—

INKWELL

But in this house?

MRS. PENCIL

I was her mother's friend.

INKWELL

You are indiscreet—

MRS. PENCIL

I was desperate for you; you kept putting me off—When I read about this strike I had to come.

SUD

Mrs. Pencil is the dreadful woman. A play can't exist without her—

WOULDBY

You mean she was his—

SUD

[*Seriously*] Oh, yes—the more fuss we make about her the better.

MRS. PENCIL

Oh, Clem! you aren't glad to see me! Oh! that I have lived for this! [*She tears around the stage waving her hands in grief—making faces of agony. Sud rises in astonishment and follows her, left.*]

SUD

[*Shrieks in anger as he dashes up the stairs to*

stage.] Idiot! Can't you talk? Do you think I write lines to be cut? How dare you cut my lines!

MRS. PENCIL

I've done just what it says. [*She takes her part from table, reads from it and shows it to him.*] "Mrs. Pencil shows extreme despair and passionately—"

SUD

That's not the play! That's the moving picture version! [*He fumbles with his papers.*]

WOULDBY

Oh, have you the same play ready for the movies?

SUD

I write in columns—along side of each other. Dramatic version, moving picture, novelization—for magazines—newspapers and books.

WOULDBY

All *at once!*

SUD

Yes!

WOULDBY

What are all the pins for?

SUD

When I cut out a line one place—I keep it until I find a place somewhere else to patch it in. [*Hands new lines to Mrs. Pencil who is back of table, centre.*]

WOULDBY

A great playwright has to be economical with his great ideas!

SUD

Yes, if he wants a yacht.

MRS. PENCIL

[*Studying her book*] Now I see, now I see—Mr. Sud. Shall I go on?

SUD

Yes, go on! [*Sud goes halfway downstairs and waits.*]

MRS. PENCIL

Oh! Clem—I was so frightened when I heard about the strikers. Even if you are their leader now, they might turn and murder you.

[*Mrs. Pencil and Inkwell play centre, front of table.*]

INKWELL

Nonsense, I control the strikers, they come to me for orders. I'll stop this strike as soon as old Ivory gives me my price.

MRS. PENCIL

What do the bricklayers want?

INKWELL

They want shorter hours, more pay, better lighting—better air—[*Inkwell stops and looks up at Sud.*]

SUD

Go on—go on—don't glare at *me!*

INKWELL

Pardon me, Mr. Sud—but you have me say the bricklayers want better air. It doesn't sound right. You see bricklayers work out of doors and the air there is—I beg your pardon—it's in no way of criticism, sir—

SUD

Come here. [*He cuts the line.*] Leave out "lighting and air!" That's a confusion from bad typing in the serial version. Go on, Mr. Inkwell.

INKWELL

[*Sits right of table and Mrs. Pencil left.*] See here, Kate, you keep out of this business—I'm not going to be spied on by any woman.

MRS. PENCIL

Who is spying on you? [*In whisper.*]

INKWELL

You! [*In whisper.*]

MRS. PENCIL

I?

SUD

[*Smacks his lips*] Now we are coming to a big scene! There is nothing so effective as the repetition of the same words brought up to a climax. Begin again, Mrs. Pencil. "Who is spying on you?"

MRS. PENCIL

Who is spying on you?

INKWELL

You!

MRS. PENCIL

I?

INKWELL

You!

MRS. PENCIL

I?

INKWELL

You!

MRS. PENCIL

I?

SUD

[*Tearing his hair—going to them*] Parrots! Nothing but parrots! Increase the stress—build up the scene—build—build!

INKWELL

How can we build when you don't give us any lines?

SUD

What do you call yourselves actors for if you can't supply acting when the playwright uses dashes!—This is the biggest scene in the play. [*Crosses to lower left.*] The very fact that I don't give you a lot of literary lines puts me in the class of the most forceful dramatists of the day? My plays are not wishy-washy lines? They are full of action—red-blood—of flesh and blood! Now you do *your* part—bing-bang stuff!—shake them in their chairs out there—make shivers run up their

spines! Make 'em *feel* you! Compel their applause! Now go to it! Go to it!

[*Sud sets the tempo, repeating their words.*]

INKWELL

You!

MRS. PENCIL

I?

INKWELL

You!

MRS. PENCIL

I?

SUD

[*Shouts*] Get it over! Mr. Wouldby, is it getting over?

WOULDBY

[*Looks at footlights*] I don't see anything get over.

SUD

He doesn't see it! You hear? He doesn't see it! Begin again! And please, please, please—get it over—over! [*He motions violently with his arms during following scene as if to help them raise the vitality of the scene. Sud sets tempo again, stamping his foot.*]

MRS. PENCIL

Who is spying on you?

INKWELL

You!

MRS. PENCIL

I?

INKWELL

You!

MRS. PENCIL

I?

INKWELL

You!!

MRS. PENCIL

I??

INKWELL

You!!!

MRS. PENCIL

I??

INKWELL

[*Fiercely*] You!!!

MRS. PENCIL

I???

INKWELL

What do you call it, then, coming here after me like this?

MRS. PENCIL

What do you mean—like this?

SUD

[*Shrieks—beside himself*] Like what?

MRS. PENCIL

Like this?

SUD

Accent it—stress it—increase it! Like *what?*

MRS. PENCIL

Like this!

SUD

Like *what?*

MRS. PENCIL

Like this!

SUD

[*Rushes around the stage, kicking over a chair in a passion of despair*] The best scene in the play—ruined—ruined! I'm noted for my strong, laconic scenes and you make me suffer like this. Perfectly hopeless—I say increase—you decrease; nothing but animal sounds! Nothing but a machine! Oh! what's the use! Go on, go on—now you see, Mr. Wouldby, how actors can make plays fail!—

MRS. PENCIL

If you'd write us a decent play once—

SUD

No back-talk, madam! I haven't engaged you yet. If you can't play it any better, I'll let you out! Show us what you can do with the rest of the scene! By George—if you can't pound his chest right the box office will lose money on you!

WOULDBY

[*His eyes popping*] OH! must she pound him?

SUD

Seeing a woman pounding a man's chest and

hearing her scream is worth 3 dollars to anybody. Go on, Mrs. Pencil.

MRS. PENCIL

You are keeping something from me? You have deceived me! You dog! Tell me! Tell me! Who is she? Where is she? You are keeping something from me!

[*She pounds Inkwell in a rage.*]

WOULDBY

[*In innocent wonderment*] Is she trying to yank it out of his chest?

SUD

Pound! Pound! Get it over!

[*Sud rushes back between Mrs. Pencil and Inkwell, pushes her down left, drags Inkwell to centre, grasps his coat lapel, shakes him violently and shouts her lines: "You are keeping something from me" and pushes Inkwell to right. Sud turns quickly to left and shows her his manuscript.*]

I wrote "applause" here. You've got to get applause here—so pound!

INKWELL

Would you mind skipping the scene today? I'll wear a foot-ball suit tomorrow.

SUD

[*In scorn*] Just like an actor to have a personal prejudice against a part.

INKWELL

I'm not "suited" to it yet—but with the proper costume—

SUD

[*In scorn*] You must *not* rely on costume! Think of your *art!*

WOULDBY

But why must she pound him so hard?

SUD

[*Down left*] Because he is the villain and the audience likes to see him get it.

MRS. PENCIL

[*At right and Inkwell to her left*] Who is she? You are keeping something from me!

WOULDBY

What has he done to make him the villain?

SUD

I didn't want an explanation here so I had to interrupt them—Sch—here comes Miss Ivory.

[*Miss Ivory enters right.*]

SUD

Such interruptions reek with dramatic intensity.

MISS IVORY

Here is the arrack for you, Mr. Inkwell—

INKWELL

[*Accepting it*] Thank you.

MRS. PENCIL

[*Nervously; Inkwell gives her her hat*] Think I'll take my hat to my room—

[*She goes out left.*]

SUD

[*Aside*] Not a bad excuse, the hat? Eh? I had to get her out.

WOULDBY

Very natural—yes indeed—

MISS IVORY

[*Seated at right of table. Inkwell stands back of table—centre.*] Well, Mr. Inkwell, I hope we may yet succeed in claiming you as a friend—instead of coddling you as an enemy.

INKWELL

If you treat all your enemies so well—what must you do for your friends.

MISS IVORY

We abuse those we love.

SUD

[*Chuckling to Wouldby*] Quite epigrammatic, eh?

INKWELL

Even abuse at such fair hands could only please.

SUD

[*Aside*] Did you catch the subtlety of that line?

MISS IVORY

[*Nervously*] Wi—wi—will you have some more tea?

INKWELL

[*Coming left of table—to be opposite her; catching her hand*] I don't want tea—I want you! I love you!

SUD

Wait a moment! That's too abrupt! I've some more lines here somewhere. [*Looks through slips pinned in manuscript*] I cut some out of the beginning of the act. When the first curtain went up and the maid was discovered dusting the room I had the Irish butler make love to her. [*Handing Inkwell a paragraph*] There, Inkwell, are the love lines I was looking for. Proceed, please.

MISS IVORY

Shall I go back?

INKWELL

To tea.

MISS IVORY

Wi—wi—will you have some m—more—t—tea?

INKWELL

[*Catching her hand and bringing her forward, he gives speech with Irish accent*] I don't want tea —I want you! I love you! Oh! my darlin't h't is a terrible sensation. I 'ave for you, I 'ave—'and me your little 'and in moine, for the loikes of you I never— [*as all look dazed and Inkwell has trouble twisting his tongue*] I beg pardon, Mr.

Sud, but this is a butler making love—I am playing the part of a gentleman—

SUD

[*Has retired in tears and rage up right*] Haven't you any brains of your own? If a musician can transpose music by sight, can't you do the same to dialogue?

INKWELL

But a gentleman doesn't make love like a—

SUD

[*Goes up stage again*] He means the same—now go on—I can't stand these arguments. They will give me apoplexy! Go on, go on, go on!!

MISS IVORY

Oh! come, Robert, say anything. [*They sit at table again.*]

INKWELL

Ahem!

MISS IVORY

Wi—wi—will you have some more t—tea?

INKWELL

I don't want tea! I want you! I love you! Oh! my darling—it is a wonderful feeling—this one—that—which I have for you—indeed—that one which I have for you—put your hand in mine—for a woman like you never before fr—fr—never before—that, which—have I seen a woman *such* as you— [*Again he has brought Miss Ivory down centre.*]

SUD

My stars! Leave out *that—which—such!*—
Get it clear for tomorrow's rehearsal.

INKWELL

[*Puts paragraph into his pocket—hesitatingly, doubtfully, sarcastically*] I ought to have my name on the program as co-author.

SUD

[*Jumps forward*] You ought to have it cut out of the program when you forget to act!

INKWELL

But I'm worried about this play. I don't know how it's going to end.

[*Exit left.*]

SUD

[*Proudly*] I'm the *author*, leave *that* to *me!*

[*Raps on floor and cries out*] Mr. Ruler—Mr. Ruler!

RULE

[*Off stage*] What is it?

SUD

Pay some attention to your cues, please!—

[*Sud goes into pit.*]

RULER

[*Pokes head in from left*] Beg pardon, sir—I didn't hear my cue!

SUD

It's your business to listen for it.

RULER

But they didn't give me the cue!

SUD

Well, what is your cue?

RULER

What is it?

SUD

I asked you what your cue was?

RULER

[*Advances*] What is it?

SUD

Is your hearing perfectly clear?

RULER

Perfectly.

SUD

Then will you kindly tell me what your cue is?

RULER

What is it.

SUD

I shall go mad! I'm dealing with lunatics! Lunatics—Once again I ask you, Mr. Ruler—if you can *hear!* [*Yells*] Kindly read from your book and tell me what your cue is—

RULER

[*Yells furiously and is now down stage*] I've been trying to tell you my cue is "WHAT IS IT!"—

[*During this scene all the other players come in to see the fight.*]

SUD

[*Wipes perspiration from brow*] Heart disease! Heart disease—I shall die of it! That line was cut long ago! [*Sud walks back and forth across the pit.*] The trouble with you actors is you can't forget. Oh! if you could only forget!

WOULDBY

[*Meekly*] I always thought actors had to remember.

SUD

Any fool can remember—

RULER

See here, Mr. Sud—I don't take abuse! In fact, it's my first experience taking it from authors. In all the other companies I've been in the manager kept the playwright out. He wouldn't have him meddling about! [*Sud stops short during this speech—turns—straightens up—buttons coat—adjusts tie—faces Ruler.*]

SUD

Mr. Ruler, I am backing the show. I haven't engaged you because you can act but because you were born good looking, which is scarcely a compliment to your own efforts. [*Other players retire now laughing at Ruler.*] If you please we will proceed. I'll find a line here somewhere in my treasure note books.

[*He goes upstairs and stands near border lights*

aside to hunt thro' many books he has in his pockets. Ruler sits left of table to rest and smoke.]

[*Mr. Ivory and Mrs. Pencil play cards out of character up stage.*]

MISS IVORY

[*Talks out of character and gets light from Ruler for her cigarette*] Did you see the advance notices in the paper this morning, Jack—saying the Pot-Boiler is sold out three weeks in advance?

RULER

Bill told me there's a steady line outside of the box office.

MISS IVORY

I have visions of rehearsing all night before the opening.

RULER

I'm used to doing that, my dear. What gets me is the story of the plot the Sunday edition printed. How can the newspaper know the plot before the playwright does?

MISS IVORY

Doesn't Mr. Sud know his own plot?

RULER

Why! no, my part's not written after the second act.

MISS IVORY

My part isn't either, but it doesn't worry me. These authors— [*She points to her forehead*] I don't memorize until dress rehearsal night. What's

the *use?* *They* don't know *themselves* by that time what lines they told you to keep in or put in or take out. The next morning the critics rewrite it, *anyway*, the manager—*I* don't begin to memorize really—until we're settled for a *run*.

RULER

[*Worried*] You'll throw me all out if you give wrong cues—

MISS IVORY

[*Rises and strolls about*] Oh! when I can't use my tongue I let my eyes talk. The public doesn't know the difference. *I* don't have to act, just be myself. They engage *me* for my *eyes*.

SUD

Ah! here's a precious line [*goes up to Ruler*] take it down, Mr. Ruler. "I was in the neighborhood looking for some real estate." [*All the players suppress a laugh*] Now, Mr. Ruler, you enter in time— [*Sud goes down the stairs again.*] You enter in time to interrupt Mr. Inkwell's declaration of love to Miss Ivory. They spring apart—spring! Mr. Inkwell! [*Inkwell springs*] No, the house is not on fire!—I didn't say jump.

INKWELL

Spring is the same as jump!

[*Ruler enters from left, Inkwell goes right, Miss Ivory comes centre.*]

SUD

There is no time to discuss synonyms. Go on, Miss Ivory.

MISS IVORY

Oh! Jack—Hello!—where'd *you* come from?

RULER

I was in the neighborhood looking at some real estate—Hello, Inkwell—How's the strike?

[*Miss Ivory and Ruler cross to give Ruler the centre.*]

INKWELL

If you could persuade Mr. Ivory to—

RULER

No—Inkwell!—I'm not converted to your view! I have my own theories!

SUD

[*To Wouldby*] Now we are coming to the kernel of the play's success. The new viewpoint— Use all the stock characters and situations you want but add a new twist.

WOULDBY

What does Ruler think?

SUD

Listen.

RULER

I believe sternly in justice—righteous expiation of sin—only in that way can we progress to higher things.

SUD

Forms, not things.

RULER

Beg pardon, forms—the position I hold today is

the result of my desires in my previous life—when the trumpet calls me into the next—there I shall—reap the harvest of what I have sown here. Why should we help the brick layers?

MISS IVORY

[*Interrupts*] Mr. Sud.

SUD

Sch! [*and waves her silent.*]

RULER

If they chose in their past life to be born brick layers here, have we the right—

[*Miss Ivory interrupts several times. Miss Ivory is on stage left.*]

SUD

Sch!

RULER

I ask you—have we the right to tear down the building they designed when they were here before? Have we the right to say to them how they shall lay the bricks in the foundation for their next life? Have we the right—

MISS IVORY

[*Down stage—front*] Mr. Sud!

SUD

[*At last in desperation, near her in orchestra pit*] Well, what is it, Miss Ivory?

MISS IVORY

Excuse me, Mr. Sud—but all this time—while

Ruler is talking—I don't know what to do with my *hands!* Couldn't you *cut* his *lines?*

RULER

I protest! Mr. Sud, I would resent having a part shortened on me because the leading lady doesn't know what to do with her hands. I really think in this speech of mine you have shown your talent. To cut one word of it would do you a great injustice!

SUD

[*Smiles at Ruler*] Thank you! Quite so! Quite so! Miss Ivory during this scene you might be—you might be—be—fanning yourself—to keep yourself, the heroine, cool and white.

WOULDBY

How well you understand human nature. The play is really more important than the players—isn't it?

SUD

[*Aside to Wouldby*] Of course, but actors are so superbly conceited.

WOULDBY

I know; poor things!

SUD

Mr. Ivory's entrance.

WOULDB

The girl's father?

IVORY

[*Enters*] I could not find the papers in the safe, Inkwell. Ah—how—do you do, Jack

Positions

Inkwell *Miss Ivory*

Mr. Ivory *Ruler*

[*Ivory has crossed to Ruler and is between Miss Ivory and Ruler.*]

RULER

Good morning, Mr. Ivory.

IVORY

Daughter dear—do you know anything about the papers in the safe?

SUD

Keep up the suspense—Inkwell.

INKWELL

I have no lines here.

SUD

A villain should sustain the suggestion of villainy whether he has lines or not. Look uneasy—tremble—

INKWELL

[*Looks uneasy and trembles.*]

IVORY

But if I see him tremble, Mr. Sud, wouldn't I ask him if he had a chill?

SUD

It's not your business to be looking his way just then. Again Inkwell.

INKWELL

[*Trembles, etc.*]

SUD

[*Yells to Ivory*] Don't catch his eye!

IVORY

[*To Inkwell*] Will you tremble again, please.

INKWELL

[*Does so patiently.*]

SUD

Count 5—for the tremble. Again please, "Daughter dear, do you know anything about the papers in the safe?"

IVORY

Daughter dear, do you know anything about the papers in the safe?

SUD

[*Excitedly*] Everybody look away. Tremble, Inkwell—Now, Inkwell, count 5—now look at Inkwell—Again please.

IVORY

Daughter dear, do you know anything about the papers in the safe?

SUD

[*Claps his hands*] One—two—three—four—five—

IVORY

[*To Inkwell*] Those valuable papers!

SUD

That's it, go ahead!

MISS IVORY

I don't even know the combination, father. Could they have been stolen?

WOULDBY

Did Inkwell really take them?

SUD

He's the villain, isn't he? I couldn't let the hero do it.

MR. IVORY

What shall I do? Where shall I look? Where, O where?

[*Ivory goes up stage back of Miss Ivory to table and knocks off revolvers.*]

MISS IVORY

Oh! revolvers!

RULER

Let me, sir. [*Picks them up.*]

MISS IVORY

[*In terror*] Where did they come from?

WOULDBY

[*Hands to ears*] Are they going to use them?

SUD

Of course. I had to show the audience the revolvers are there, so Ivory had to knock them down.

IVORY

[*Is up stage. Places one revolver on table*] I have to have these near by when a strike is on, one never knows what to expect.

RULER

[*Places other revolver on table*] Even I have one in my pocket.

INKWELL

[*Slaps his side pocket*] And I in mine—

MISS IVORY

Oh! dear, how dreadful; suppose one of them should go off. Oh! do be careful!

INKWELL

[*Insinuatingly*] Have you changed your mind, Mr. Ivory? Have you decided to accept my proposition?

MISS IVORY

What is your proposition, Mr. Inkwell?

INKWELL

[*Goes left to Ruler*] I believe your father wishes to discuss it with you. Mr. Ruler, will you have a smoke with me in the orangangerie?

SUD

[*Corrects him with great disgust*] Orangerie!
[*Inkwell and Ruler exeunt right.*]

MISS IVORY

[*Crosses right; anxiously*] *What* does he want to know—

IVORY

[*Almost breaking down. Sinks into chair left of table.*] Oh, my daughter—how can I tell you—how can I—I am ruined—ruined!

SUD

[*Rises, and beats time in rhythm like a conductor to their "Ohs".*]

MISS IVORY

[*Left of table*] *You—ruined*—Oh!—

IVORY

Oh!

MISS IVORY

Oh!—

SUD

[*Turning to Wouldby and whispers audibly*] When you are hard up for conversation use "Oh's—"

IVORY

We have lived beyond our means—Oh!—my child—I have only brought you misery—

MISS IVORY

[*Goes to father, stands back of his chair and caresses him.*] Poor father—don't take it that way—I *love* you—we must live differently—anything you say—

WOULDBY

[*To Sud*] How sweet and sacrificial!

SUD

[*Enthusiastically*] Ah! she's pure Ivory—a chip off the old block!

IVORY

That is not all! Inkwell represents the brick layers; he will continue the strike unless I can buy him off.

[*Sud goes up right, to be behind them. Faces them. Follows every line in his manuscript.*]

MISS IVORY

And you can't raise the money?

IVORY

He doesn't want money. He wants to marry you! He will stop at nothing to get me into prison—any place to crush me—he has power. I have cause to fear him. [*Ivory at right.*]

MISS IVORY

[*At left; in distress*] Oh! Oh!—how terrible—how terrible!—what am I to say? Oh—father—and I can save you? And I hesitate? Yes—yes—I will—father!

[***Rushes to Ivory's arms.***]

MR. IVORY

Oh! my daughter! My child! My child!

MISS IVORY

Yes, father, I will, cost me what it may. I will.

[*She reads last line flatly.*]

SUD

Miss Ivory! Show some feeling! Think how you feel when you read those lines!

MISS IVORY

I know how I feel when I read *those* lines! [*Impudently; then with some feeling*] Yes, father, I will. Cost me what it may, I will. Mr. Inkwell!

SUD

Abandonment, Miss Ivory—abandonment—"Mr. Inkwell! Mr. Inkwell!"

MISS IVORY

[*Nods intelligently*] Mr. Inkwell! Mr. In-n-k-we-ell—!

IVORY

[*Rushing after Miss Ivory*] Wait—think—consider—

MISS IVORY

Mr. Inkwell—I have decided—*yes*—YES!

[*Inkwell and Ruler enter right.*]

INKWELL

[*Takes her hand*] Oh! my dear!

IVORY

[*With bowed head*] Oh!

RULER

[*In alarm to Miss Ivory*] My dear—what is it?

SUD

[*Pouncingly*] Now *there's* your line, "what is it." I *tucked* it in *there.*

MISS IVORY

[*Goes left to Mr. Ruler. Ivory is up centre. Inkwell is right.*]

I can't keep my promise to you—Mr. Ruler—please don't ask for an explanation.

RULER

[*Excited, rushing up to Mr. Ivory*] What is it, Mr. Ivory?

IVORY

[*In despair, taking Ruler's arm for support*] Oh!—I—am broken hearted—broken hearted—she is going to marry Inkwell!

RULER

No!—no!—not while I live! [*Goes with Ivory easily.*]

IVORY

It must be! Come with me—I'll tell you—alone!

RULER

Not while I live!

SUD

[*Excitedly*] Mr. Ruler! Mr. Ruler! You go out too easily! Wait! I remember a precious line I cut out of one of my last year's plays. It is perfectly fresh, no novelty worn off and incontestably original! "I am coming back."

RULER

[*Deferentially Ruler writes the line.*] I am coming back—yes, sir. I am coming back.

SUD

There is no "yes, sir" in it.

RULER

No, sir.

SUD

Do you wish to retire a few minutes and commit to memory? [*Ruler repeats the line.*] Now that we are reaching the climax I want as few interruptions and references to the book as possible—

RULER

I think I have it. [*All resume former positions.*] Cue please, Mr. Ivory.

IVORY

[*Drags Ruler across to go out right*] Come—with me—I'll tell you!—alone!

RULER

Not while I live! I am coming back! I am coming back! I am coming back!

[*Exeunt Ivory and Ruler right.*]

[*Sud tiptoes up centre to make sure Mrs. Pencil is ready for her cue.*]

INKWELL

[*To Miss Ivory*] Now that they have left us alone—my darling—let me tell you how I have waited for this moment—

MISS IVORY

[*In despair and tears she tries to rush by to right but he catches her.*] No—let me pass—not now; I have said yes; let it go at that—I cannot talk now—not now—

[*Exit right weeping.*]

MRS. PENCIL

[*In fury of jealousy opens door left and enters in rage*] Coward! Villain!—I have been listening behind that door—all your vows to me were false!

INKWELL

[*He tries to choke her*] Don't yell so!

MRS. PENCIL

[*In ordinary tone*] I will yell!

SUD

[*Delighted*] Of *course* she will! Shriek *good*, Mrs. Pencil.

MRS. PENCIL

[*Shrieks*] Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!

INKWELL

[*They struggle. Grabs Mrs. Pencil and tries to put his hand over her mouth.*] Stop! Stop!

SUD

Tussle! Tussle! The audience loves it!

[*They fight.*]

WOULDBY

But what did Inkwell do?

SUD

[*Talks fast over shoulder to Wouldby as a man in a fast auto talks to another passing*] Can't tell you. Haven't decided yet! Explanation in last act. No time now. Reaching climax of play. Keep it up! Keep it up!

MRS. PENCIL

[*Yelling*] Oh! the treachery—perjury!—You are not fit to live! I'll have my revenge—! Revenge! Bing! Bang! [*She grabs tiny revolver from table and shoots with a "pop" at Inkwell. He falls back and obligingly lies upon the table.*] I hate you! I hate you! I hate you!

MISS IVORY

[*Having heard the shot and shrieks runs in from the right crying*] Oh—who's hurt?

MRS. PENCIL

[*Turning and aiming revolver at Miss Ivory*] Don't come near him or I'll shoot you!

RULER

[*Enters from right*] What's the matter?

MISS IVORY

[*Screams at Ruler*] Don't move or she'll shoot *you.*

RULER

[*Taking a revolver out of his pocket, aims it at Mrs. Pencil*] Harm her and I'll shoot *you!*

INKWELL

[*Who has come to in the meantime, manages to get his own revolver out of his pocket; he half raises himself from his lying position on the table and aims at Ruler crying hoarsely*] You thought you could be my rival—the girl said she would be mine! If you shoot the woman, she'll kill the girl. I'm going to save the girl. Shoot and I'll kill *YOU!*

MR. IVORY

[*Has entered from right and hearing these desperate words—takes revolver from his pocket and aims it at Inkwell! Screams in fear and rage*] Stop! save him or I'll shoot to kill! I'll shoot to kill! I'll shoot to kill!

WOULDBY

[*Thrilled and excited, cries out*] Who shoots?

SUD

[*Overcome with sudden realization, jumps up, grabs his forehead, shrieks*] Ah! it's a deadlock! I don't know who shoots!

WOULDBY

[*Hurrying out of house in disgust*] Oh! shoot the author!

[*Sud runs up to the stage in despair, wildly motioning down the curtain.*]

In vaudeville Miss Ivory asks, "Who shoots?" and all the players exclaim in disgust, "Oh, shoot the author!"

CURTAIN

HEARTS

A ONE ACT PLAY

CHARACTERS

The characters are four women of fashion.

Mrs. Russell Russell, *Jessica*
Mrs. Philip Martingay, *Cynthia*
Mrs. Edwin Puff, *Nell*
Mrs. Jay Thorne

First production at the Anna Morgan Studios, Chicago. Later played at the Grace Hickox Studios, Chicago; Houston, Texas; Boston, Mass.; Evanston, Ill., etc.

Copyrighted, 1917, by Alice Gerstenberg

HEARTS

SCENE: *A fashionable drawing-room. There is a large high backed arm chair at right and a card table at an angle centre—left. Jessica is seated at the table facing the audience. Cynthia is seated left of table and Nell at right. There is a fourth chair, vacant, with its back partly to the audience. The last card of a dummy hand lies on the table before it. As the curtain rises each woman holds a card in her hand and all are chattering unintelligibly.*

JESSICA

[*Plays her last card.*]

NELL

[*Plays the last card of her dummy hand*] Of course she uses belladonna in her eyes. They are much too brilliant to be natural.

CYNTHIA

[*Plays her last card*] With a doctor for a husband one can learn anything about drugs.

NELL

[*Playing the last card from her own hand and taking the trick*] She wouldn't stop at anything which helps to fascinate men. It's my game. [*Silently figures and pencils score.*]

CYNTHIA

Jay Thorne had no business marrying the second time. We got along so nicely with dear departed Anne. *She* never aroused antagonism.

NELL

Anne was so sweet.

CYNTHIA

Anne was so *sensible*. She knew a doctor had to make professional visits to other women but *this* Mrs. Thorne won't let him out of her sight.

JESSICA

[*Shuffling cards*] Not only that, Cynthia, if she only stopped at holding on to her *own* husband, but she annexes every *other* husband she can get.

NELL

You can just see them lick sugar from her hand.

CYNTHIA

Now you've said it, Nell, that's just the attitude Philip took the other evening when he shook hands with her at Mrs. Hale's dinner. Didn't I lecture him afterwards though! You have no business, I said, showing deference like that to any other woman but me, I said, I'm your wife, I said, I come first, I said.

JESSICA

[*Giving cards to Cynthia to cut*] Oh, I laid the law down to Russell too. He wouldn't talk to me for three days, said I was jealous, said he was paying me back for monopolizing the doctor away from poor dear Anne when she was alive. Said he

was jolly well glad I knew now how *he* used to feel when the doctor monopolized *me!*

NELL

[*Jealously*] Oh, did Dr. Thorne come to see *you* often, Jessica? I don't see how he could have had time. We kept him so busy at *our* house, with all the children needing him constantly.

CYNTHIA

And Dr. Thorne called on *me* every day after my serious operation. I used to say to him, I said, "you saved my life" and he thanked *me* for living.

JESSICA

Now don't start about your operation.

CYNTHIA

[*As they take up their cards*] But none of you have had such an operation! Why [*proudly*], *I* have gone down into the medical books as a unique case!

NELL

Poor dear Anne never flaunted gold bags and Russian sables! This Mrs. Thorne is living evidence of the outrageous fees we have to pay!

JESSICA

I make it no trump.

NELL

[*Going right on talking*] Every time she has a new gown I know we paid for it!

CYNTHIA

I pass.

NELL

[*Going right on talking*] And Edwin says she's deuced right to make the best of her looks, but if I buy a new gown I have to pay it out of my own check-book!

JESSICA

I made it no trump.

NELL

Did you say no trump? And I play first. Well, there— [*Puts down card.*]

JESSICA

[*Reaching across table to play dummy*] Now for dummy. She's most inconsiderate not to come on time.

CYNTHIA

Why did you invite her at all?

JESSICA

If *you* don't invite her you may need another operation and she can keep the doctor from performing it.

CYNTHIA

The cat!

JESSICA

[*Playing card for dummy*] If we ask her to little affairs like this we can afford to leave her out of the social events that count. The doctor hates them anyway and never comes. Why should we take her in? Who was she anyway?

[*Nell plays, Jessica plays, takes a trick and plays again.*]

CYNTHIA

[*Plays*] He just picked her up in Florida, she might be the worst kind of adventuress.

NELL

[*In glee and stops playing to gossip*] Oh, I've a juicy bit to tell, it makes me lick my lips!

JESSICA

[*Delighted*] Do tell us!

CYNTHIA

[*Delighted*] Isn't it fun to discuss her? Everybody does!

NELL

Mrs. Twombly thought it was very pretentious for Mrs. Thorne to have a box at the opera and decided she would cut her outright.

CYNTHIA

Oh, I heard the tale!

JESSICA

I didn't; tell me.

NELL and CYNTHIA

On opening night Mrs. Thorne— [*Both stop.*]

NELL

[*To Cynthia*] You tell it!

CYNTHIA

[*To Nell*] No, you started it.

NELL

On opening night in comes Mrs. Thorne much bedecked, enters her box next to Mrs. Twombly, and Mrs. Twombly in full view of the house turns away her head.

JESSICA

I should have died of mortification

CYNTHIA

Not Mrs. Thorne.

NELL

No, Mrs. Thorne leans over to her husband and in a whisper loud enough for everybody to hear she asks him sweetly: "Jay, dear, am I mistaken, but isn't that the Mrs. Twombly you operated for a floating kidney?"

JESSICA

She didn't say that!

NELL

She certainly did!

JESSICA

Wasn't Mrs. Twombly furious?

CYNTHIA

The worst of it is it didn't stop there. The story is going the rounds. A guest in Mrs. Twombly's box repeated the story to someone else and called the floating kidney—a *swimming gizzard!*

JESSICA

And now, I suppose, Mrs. Twombly doesn't dare cut her again!

NELL

My dear, people are beginning to realize that Mrs. Thorne is far too dangerous to cut.

[*The portieres part back right and Mrs. Thorne, a stunning woman gowned with great taste, enters. She has charm of manner, a well modulated voice, and sweetness in her nature under a surface of society poise, defensive rather than aggressive.*]

MRS. THORNE

The maid told me to come in.

JESSICA

[*Rises to greet her*] Oh, Mrs. Thorne.

MRS. THORNE

Sorry I'm late, Mrs. Russell. I was detained at luncheon with Mrs. Paul Stafford.

NELL

[*Raises eye-brows at Cynthia*] Luncheon with Mrs. Paul Stafford.

CYNTHIA

[*Raises her eye-brows at Nell.*]

JESSICA

We played a few rounds while waiting. You know Mrs. Martingay and Mrs. Puff?

MRS. THORNE

Yes indeed.

[*She goes as if to greet them but changes her mind as they do not move.*]

CYNTHIA

[*Coldly*] How do you do.

NELL

[*Nods.*]

MRS. THORNE

[*Feels the chilliness of the atmosphere, takes a measuring glance, and determines to win the women over.*] I remember that Mrs. Martingay has a very charming husband.

CYNTHIA

You did pay a lot of attention to him.

MRS. THORNE

An attractive man is always a living compliment to his wife and the charm she must have had to win him.

CYNTHIA

[*At a loss*] Shall we play?

MRS. THORNE

May I take off my coat?

JESSICA

So negligent of me!

MRS. THORNE

It was warm. You're home is so rightly tempered, Mrs. Russell.

NELL

I'm glad you've shown us the coat. We've heard so much about it.

MRS. THORNE

I have a cousin in Canada who can send me furs quite inexpensively. I wouldn't dream of causing my husband too much expense. That's what people are accusing me of. Would you mind putting them right about it?

CYNTHIA

They say you are rather clever at telling stories.

MRS. THORNE

You mean you don't believe me. I thought you were a better judge of human nature than that.

CYNTHIA

[*At a loss*] Shall we play?

JESSICA

[*With a touch of malice*] Will you take dummy's seat, Mrs. Thorne?

MRS. THORNE

Thank you, *no*, I'll wait until you finish your game.

JESSICA

[*Nervously*] Let us finish the hand quickly then.

[*They exchange glances and play the hand quickly; meanwhile Mrs. Thorne wanders about the room, smelling flowers, reading titles on books, but all the time thinking about the women and making up her mind how she should treat them.*]

CYNTHIA

The game's yours, Nell.

JESSICA

[*Rising*] Now, Mrs. Thorne.

MRS. THORNE

[*Advances graciously and with much ease takes the chair Jessica has vacated, thus obviously leaving the previous dummy chair for Jessica to take.*]

CYNTHIA

[*Holding up Mrs. Thorne's gold bag as Mrs. Thorne shuffles cards*] What a marvelous gold mesh! How many operations does it represent?

JESSICA

[*Taking it from Cynthia and opening it*] May I open it? [*She does so.*]

MRS. THORNE

[*As she deals*] It was given to me by Mr. Crawford in gratitude for my husband's cure of him.

CYNTHIA

How nice of the men to pay *you* instead of your husband.

JESSICA

Oh, I've spilled some pills out of your bag.

NELL

[*Picking up pills from floor*] What a violent purple.

MRS. THORNE

I must have the catch mended on my bon-bon box. Will you have one, Mrs. Martingay? They sweeten venomous tongues.

CYNTHIA

No, thank you, they look more like poison.

NELL

I never saw pills that color.

JESSICA

[*Laughs*] Are they medicine for some serious malady of yours?

MRS. THORNE

[*With a smile*] They are cocciamphiberagamus.

JESSICA

[*Laughs*] That doesn't mean anything to me.

NELL

Nor to me.

MRS. THORNE

The doctor is experimenting with them. He guards them very carefully. In fact I'm not supposed to have any. I didn't dare take many at a time—just one at intervals, so it couldn't be noticed.

CYNTHIA

[*Laughs*] I wager they're poison for enemies.

MRS. THORNE

They are.

[*There is a pause.*]

JESSICA

You have a sense of humor, Mrs. Thorne.

MRS. THORNE

If you doubt me, take one. [*Passes them.*]

JESSICA

Even if I didn't believe you, I'm not willing to run the risk.

NELL

[*Laughs*] No thank you, I'd rather be safe.

CYNTHIA

I wouldn't take it on trust.

JESSICA

Try one yourself.

MRS. THORNE

Of course you think it is eccentric, dangerous, or criminal for me to be carrying cocciamphiberagamus in my purse.

NELL

Oh, I don't believe it, I'll take one.

[*She raises one to her lips but Mrs. Thorne knocks it out of her hand, then picks it up carefully and puts it back into her bag.*]

MRS. THORNE

I beg your pardon, Mrs. Puff, I'm not saving them for you.

NELL

Oh, you scared me!

CYNTHIA

The law ought to look into that, Mrs. Thorne!

JESSICA

It ought to be reported to your husband.

CYNTHIA

That is just what we shall have to do.

JESSICA

Let's go on with the game. I don't want notoriety!

MRS. THORNE

Very well. I dealt—I bid two hearts.

CYNTHIA

Two spades.

JESSICA

One diamond.

NELL

Three hearts.

MRS. THORNE

I'm very fond of hearts.

JESSICA

It sounds reckless to me but if you think you can—

MRS. THORNE

Hearts again—how about it, Mrs. Martingay, do you overbid me in hearts?

CYNTHIA

No, but you have to be a good player to make them.

MRS. THORNE

We'll see.

CYNTHIA

Shall I play?

JESSICA

My hand down.

MRS. THORNE

You haven't given me much help, have you?

JESSICA

I as much as told you, you were risking a lot on hearts.

MRS. THORNE

Perhaps; but I'd rather lose in hearts than never do my utmost to win them.

NELL

Oh, yes, they say you win *men's* hearts quite easily.

MRS. THORNE

[*Throws down her cards, rises*] There, that's just enough! I can't stand these slurs another moment! It's the end!

CYNTHIA, NELL, JESSICA

[*Startled*] Mrs. Thorne!

MRS. THORNE

I came to this city a stranger, brought by a doctor you all like and respect. You should have honored his love for me but instead you hated and hurt me. It has grieved him to see the fight I have had to make for even decent recognition.

NELL

Mrs. Thorne!

MRS. THORNE

He wants to go away, give up his big practice

here; start some place else for my sake—but I love him so much I would rather die than hinder him. The greatest gift I can give him is taking this short way out. [*She swallows the pills and goes to big chair at right.*]

JESSICA

She swallowed them!

NELL and CYNTHIA

Mrs. Thorne!

MRS. THORNE

I've stood it as long as I could! I don't want to live any more.

JESSICA

But you can't die in my house!

MRS. THORNE

But I want to die in your house. It will pay you back for the way you robbed me of my character at the Chesters'. They told me!

JESSICA

I swear I never—

NELL

In Heaven's name, Jessica, don't argue! She'll pass out in the midst of it. You'd better call a doctor or the police.

JESSICA

No! Keep it out of the papers! You haven't any right to die in my house!

CYNTHIA

[*Shakes Mrs. Thorne*] You're a doctor's wife, tell us what to do.

JESSICA

[*Runs off stage crying*] Mary, run for the nearest doctor!

NELL

[*Seizes book from table*] Here's a "First Aid," what does it say about poison? [*She runs her finger down index*] Bandages, bruises, sprains, hanging, "that's suicide," no, not that! [*Her eye catches a word and she pounces upon it*] Here it is! *Poison!* [*Disappointed as she throws book aside*] Oh poison ivy!

MRS. THORNE

[*Seems to be fainting*] Do not agitate yourselves. I have contemplated this deed too long to have regrets. There is no way of saving me now.

JESSICA

[*Runs in with a glass of whiskey and water which she offers Mrs. Thorne*] Whiskey counteracts it. Drink, drink!

CYNTHIA

Force it down her!

NELL

We can't let her die!

MRS. THORNE

What difference does it make to you if I die? You wouldn't let me live!

CYNTHIA

But, Mrs. Thorne, no one knew you loved him like that.

NELL

You seemed so interested in other men.

JESSICA

Oh, why doesn't help come.

MRS. THORNE

You think men are attracted to me because I want them to be. I don't try to win them, but I have tried to win you women and that I could not do. It is not poison that is killing me, it is your hatred!

JESSICA

[*Throwing herself on her knees*] Oh, Mrs. Thorne, I implore you to do something to save yourself!

NELL

Why doesn't Mary come with a doctor!

MRS. THORNE

There are no more pills left for evidence and they cannot be traced in autopsy. It's something new my husband has been experimenting on. If you can help me back to the card table, you can call it heart failure.

NELL

It tears me to pieces to hear you talk that way.

JESSICA

It's dreadful of you to mind so much what we've

said. No one really meant anything by it. No one wants you to die.

CYNTHIA

I've been a dog, the way I've treated you. But I was jealous—and—and—the way you fought and wouldn't let yourself be downed! None of us knew about your family or your past, we don't yet—

MRS. THORNE

When Dr. Thorne met me in Florida I was resting after a long season in stock. I was an actress for ten years. Oh, air! [*Dramatically*] It's very close. [*She gasps.*]

[*Cynthia rushes to open a window.*]

NELL

You must drink! If you'll take it and forgive us and live, we'll make up a thousand times for the harm we have done—

MRS. THORNE

Would you really? If I thought that you cared I'd take it. It might not be too late.

JESSICA

Take it, take it—

CYNTHIA

If I'd known your life depended upon us I'd have done a lot of nice things for you.

MRS. THORNE

All our lives depend upon one another.

JESSICA

Oh, please, please drink this! If you'll only live we'll be your closest friends forever.

MRS. THORNE

You promise that?

JESSICA, NELL, CYNTHIA

Yes, yes!

MRS. THORNE

[*Drinks*] Then, I'll take some—

JESSICA

More than that.

CYNTHIA

All of it.

MRS. THORNE

[*Resists as they try to pour it down her throat*]
Oh, you'll have me intoxicated. [*Laughs*] No, no, I can't go that far. You see the pills are not poison. They're only throat tablets.

CYNTHIA

[*Angrily*] Mrs. Thorne! You have presumed too far!

NELL

How dare you make fools of us.

JESSICA

It's an insult in my own house!

MRS. THORNE

[*Rises*] Only severe dealing would bring you to terms! I had no idea of setting this scene when I

entered the room. Your antagonism met me at the door and Mrs. Martingay gave me the cue when she called the pills poison. I have not been an actress without learning something of the value of suggestion and I fed your minds point by point until you believed that these simple tablets under the fictitious name of cocciamphiberagamus could be fatal.

CYNTHIA

I've never been so furious in all my life!

MRS. THORNE

Remember, it was your own malice that set your trap.

JESSICA

After this, Mrs. Thorne, we'll make life harder than ever! Perhaps next time you'll take real—

MRS. THORNE

No, Mrs. Russell. I enjoy my life too much to bargain it for you. My husband is exceedingly amused when I relate my adventures and will relish this one particularly.

NELL

We'll never call your husband in again. It won't be so funny when he loses patients!

CYNTHIA

[*Sneeringly*] I call *your* method—*losing* hearts.

MRS. THORNE

[*Adorably*] No, Mrs. Martingay, I am winning them. You have proved today that you have

hearts; that you wouldn't want everyone to be as unhappy as you thought I was. You see, Mrs. Puff, you have shown me for the first time your true selves and it has made me more than ever anxious to be your friend. Do forgive me, Mrs. Russell, for my trick against you and let it cancel your tricks against me. Let's start over—with an equal deal—and play fair! All of us have better hearts than we show—let's play them out!

[*Jessica and Cynthia exchange glances.*]

[*Jessica and Nell exchange glances.*]

[*Cynthia and Nell exchange glances.*]

[*Mrs. Thorne waits expectantly.*]

[*Jessica sits.*]

[*Cynthia sits.*]

[*Nell sits.*]

[*Mrs. Thorne, realizing that she has conquered them, takes the last chair and graciously picks up the cards to start a new game. She is dealing them as the curtain falls slowly.*]

CURTAIN

BEYOND

A ONE ACT PLAY

First production at the Player's Workshop, East 57th Street, Chicago. Published by Little, Brown and Co. in a volume of "Representative One-Act Plays by American Authors," compiled by M. G. Mayorga.

Copyright, 1917, by Alice Gerstenberg

BEYOND

SCENE: *The curtain rises in darkness. The stage lights up slowly.*

The scene suggests limitless space and mist and is played behind a curtain of gauze. The floor rises from right to left as if misty clouds had made irregular stepping stones to heights off left. The wraith of a woman enters, looking misty in blue, lavender, and flesh colored chiffon, but one is less conscious of body than of the embodiment of spirit. She enters timidly, in awe, not sure of a welcome. She has died and is now passing upward to meet and to be judged by the All Powerful whom she cannot see but whom she supposes is high up off left. She speaks in that direction and moves slowly from right to left as if drawn by a magnet.

WRAITH

Is this the way I should go? You send no answer. Yet I am drawn this way, and it leads upward. Are You drawing me to Your Throne for judgment? I see nothing, my eyes are still blind to God, and yet I have died; that other part of me lies white and cold, unwarmed by the burning candles, the petals of pink roses, and the kisses of the one who weeps for me. Does his desire for me halt the progress of my soul, does his great love for me still keep me thinking of him? And because I

think of him—do You keep me blind to You? *That* would be strange! For when I lived, my love for him seemed to bring me nearer to You. Does it follow then that to know You in life one must love—and to know You in death one must forget? But I do not want to forget him! [*Pauses anxiously.*] Are You angry? You do not answer. All is silent. I am alone, terribly alone. [*Takes timid step forward left.*]

I seem to have come a very long way. I seem to have the form of myself; yet I left it solidly back there. This which I am is not solid—as if able at any moment to melt into mist—but if I become mist where does that "I" of "me" go that can think? I do not want to lose the "I" of "me" that thinks. Must I lose it? [*Pauses.*]

Perhaps You are jealous of Your Power and will not take me in until I let You merge my "I" in You! But I do not want to obliterate myself! I am *I!* Yet, if You say that You are You, the weaker of us must give in! That means—Oh, You are terribly strong and make me afraid! [*Retreats a step.*] They teach us to be afraid of You. They quote Your threats from the Book. They say You have promised punishments beyond the imagination of human minds for limitless agony, but I do not believe it! [*Softly.*] If You are without pity, You are not God! [*Pauses.*] You might have struck me because I am rebellious and critical of You, but nothing has happened. [*Steps forward left.*] I am daring to come a little nearer to You. If it is Your decree that I walk

this way, as millions have walked before me and millions will after me, You ought to take care of me.

They tell and believe a lot of things about You, but no man really knows. Will You tell me Your secret? Or must I wander eternally? If You have nothing more than this to offer, it would be better to go back to him. He is calling. [*Puts hands to her ears.*] I would rush back if I could but I do not seem able, nor can I go forward very fast. Why is it? What do You want me to do? [*Pauses.*] Can You not understand my language? or do You refuse to hear? Are You going to forget me? Is this terrible silence to be my punishment? Have You turned away from me? Answer! Answer!

Is there no one else about? No one else in trouble like mine? No company for me? But others have died. Where are they? Has each one had to go through this alone? Is this to be the experience of every one? Or have You singled me out for the torture of eternal solitude? Have I offended You so deeply that You will not even listen? Have I trangressed beyond forgiveness? Is it possible You cannot read my soul and are judging life from the surface as the world saw it, that You are not omniscient enough to go below the surface and know me as I really am? Silence! Silence!

[*Hysterically*] What do You want of me? Does it amuse You to see me suffer? Or are You jealous of my will? Do You demand abject submission?

Must I give in and bend the knee to You? Must I humiliate myself and implore the mercy You should extend unasked if You are as they say You are, powerful enough to be everywhere and see everything always? Even though You may know my life like an open page, does it amuse You to have me suffer it again in the telling? Is my life history a story to You? Does it give You pleasure to discipline me? Must I throw myself before You in despair to give You the chance to appear noble and raise me in mercy? Or are You angry because I question You! Answer! Just one word! I am Your slave! [*Throws herself upon her knees.*]

I yield, conquered! Beaten!

It is true, I sinned! The unpardonable—for a woman—The world condemned, made me endure its averted gaze. My husband would not give me legal freedom; I could not, would not renounce my lover. My crime was infidelity. A certain kind of punishment must be listed for that. I plead guilty and await punishment. [Pauses.] Still You do not answer! Are You not satisfied to see me willing to accept Your punishment?—What more do You want? [*Pauses.*]

Would You have me say I am sorry I loved him? Say I am sorry? [*Gives way to tremendous emotion.*] Do not ask it of me! I cannot say it! It would only be a lie! I am *not* sorry! Oh, punish me, but do not expect me to regret! Hear me; and understand!

My father was good, but it often seemed as if You were against him! In despair he killed him-

self! I hope You were kind to him when he passed this way. What did You do to him? [*Pauses.*] Mother had too many children. The last one killed her. I hope You rewarded her here for all her hardship there. I was the eldest, had to support them—came home—so tired—spent the night helping them make flowers they sold. Their little thin faces, their patient little hands, the tears that came and the laughter that never did—how can, why do You rob children of their childhood! I could not bear it! I had a chance to marry for money. I sacrificed myself for them! Do You not praise us for sacrificing ourselves for others? The world called the marriage legal; it was hallowed by Your church! But if You think it made me honorable and good, I know in my soul You are wrong! My greatest sin was *then* when I was not true to myself! [*Pauses.*] I hated him! He was old, hard, chose me because I was poor and in his power. Every penny he gave had to be earned in service. I conscientiously kept the bargain, even though my heart was black with ever-increasing hatred toward the world and him and You! Yes, my hatred for him made me doubt You—all Your handiwork! And I counted up against You all I had to endure, and then—my lover came.

I fled to the arms of him who sits now by the white, cold shell of me, weeping. He weeps because he thinks he has lost me; perhaps, because he feels I am in anguish here—but he need not weep for loss of love; my love will never cease! My love for him is part of You—and *You* are *eternal!* [*Moves left almost imperceptibly.*]

Through him I lost the blackness of my heart and saw the wonder of Your purple mountains, blue-green seas, and even the beauty of Your mighty storms, sweeping rains, and icy frosts—and I loved because of him all the creatures You have made and all Your trees and all Your flowers and even all the weeds. Although the world pointed a finger at me, I bore with dignity and without complaint, knowing that my heart was whiter because of love.

My Love and I, walking hand in hand, heard the birds in Your forest and through them the voice of You. We stood on hill crests, awed by the beauty of Your landscapes, and, moved by the marvelous colors, worshiped the artist in You. We saw the mists of evening hover over mountain peaks and fancied they were veils hiding You. But *we knew You were there!* And our love rose as one love to *You!*

Is a love that brings consciousness of You a sin? Was my love for him a sin? Was not rather that other relationship, the real sin against You because through it I lost You? Will *You* judge as the world judges? Is Your silence and this solitude a place for my soul to battle for itself?

Still—You do not answer and see—how far I've come! I did not know I was moving nearer to You—but I have! How much farther must I come? *Then* will You answer me?

[*With triumphant conviction and faith*] You cannot deny me! In *my* idea of You there is Justice! To plead for mercy and to implore forgive-

ness is to confess a God that can be swayed! *My* God needs no finite aid in judgment! If You are at all, You are supreme! [*By this time she has reached the height at left.*] Punish! If you think You must—but I come to You with love and expectant of Justice! [*As she goes off left a glow of light illumines her face.*]

CURTAIN

FOURTEEN

A ONE ACT PLAY

CHARACTERS

MRS. HORACE PRINGLE, *a woman of fashion*
ELAINE, *her debutante daughter*
DUNHAM, *the butler or maid*

First production in Arthur Maitland's Theatre, San Francisco. Played at Hollywood Community Theatre, California; College Club Players, Cleveland, Ohio; Braintree, Mass.; Ridgewood, N. J.; Cincinnati, Ohio; Newton Highlands, Mass.; Winnetka, Illinois; Culver-Stockton Dramatic Club, Theatre Arts Club, Detroit; Portland, Maine; Omaha, Neb.; Wheeling, W. Va.; St. Louis, Mo., etc. "Fourteen" was published in the February issue of the Drama Magazine, 1920.

COPYRIGHTED, 1919, BY ALICE GERSTENBERG

FOURTEEN

SCENE: *The dining-room of a New York residence. A long table running from left to right, with a chair at each end and six chairs on each side, is set elaborately for fourteen. Dunham, the butler, is hovering over the table to give it a few finishing touches as Mrs. Pringle comes in. She is a woman of fashion, handsome, and wears a very lovely evening gown. She is rather excitable in temperament but withal capable and executive, vivacious and humorously charming. She enters in haste carrying a corsage bouquet of flowers and the empty box and paper from which she has unwrapped them.*

MRS. PRINGLE

Dunham, I've just had word from Mr. Harper that he was called away to the bedside of a friend who is very ill. He sent me these flowers—it's a good thing he *did*. I don't approve of young men refusing dinner invitations the very last minute.

DUNHAM

[*Relieving her*] I'll take the box and paper, Mrs. Pringle.

MRS. PRINGLE

[*Looking at the table anxiously and then at her watch*] It's too bad—after you've set it all so beautifully—and it's getting so late—some one might be coming any moment. How's cook?

DUNHAM

Cook's in a temper, as always, madam.

MRS. PRINGLE

I'm glad to hear it. She's like an actress—the better the temper, the better the performance. As long as she serves us a good dinner I don't care how much she swears. The rest of you can just keep out of her way. Where's Gustave?

DUNHAM

I'm sorry to have to say it, madam, but there's such an awful blizzard out he's sweeping off the sidewalk.

MRS. PRINGLE

Oh! Dear me, yes! I should have ordered an awning! But who expected a storm like this. [*She glances out of the window.*]

[*Elaine, a young debutante in evening gown, comes running in with a bunch of place-cards.*]

ELAINE

Here are the place-cards, mother, and the diagram. Shall I put them around?

MRS. PRINGLE

Yes, dear. Elaine, I'm going up to look after your father. He's so helpless about his ties. [*She starts to leave the room.*] Remove one plate, Dunham.

DUNHAM

Remove one plate, madam? Oh! Madam! It is a certainty! You wouldn't sit down with thirteen.

MRS. PRINGLE

[*Drawing back*] Thirteen! Why, you're right —thirteen! We can never sit down with thirteen. That's all due to Mr. Harper's negligence. Sick friend, nothing! He's just one of those careless men who never answer their invitations in time. His flowers, indeed, to make me forgive him—now look at the trouble he's put me to—thirteen! I wonder whom I could get to come in the last minute. Quick—Elaine—help me think. [*She rushes to the telephone and looks madly through her list of acquaintances.*]

ELAINE

There's always Uncle George.

MRS. PRINGLE

He never opens his head!

DUNHAM

Mr. Morgan, madam, he always tells a joke or two.

MRS. PRINGLE

Why, yes, Dunham—that's clever of you! Hello Central—Lakeview 5971—at once, please—Elaine dear, your hair's much too tight—pull it out—pull it out—come here. [*In telephone.*] Mr. Morgan's? Well, this is Mrs. Pringle speaking—from across the street. Yes. When Mr. Morgan comes in, please tell him to call me up right away. I want him to dine with us—in about ten minutes—you expect him? [*She pulls Elaine's hair out to make it look fluffier. Elaine makes faces of pain, but her mother pays no attention.*] Have him call me right

away. [*She hangs up the receiver.*] Now if he shouldn't get it—*then* what'll I do?

ELAINE

Well, mother, *I* don't have to be at the table. It's your party, anyway. Everybody's married and older than I am.

MRS. PRINGLE

[*Pointing to the table diagram in Elaine's hand*] Didn't I place you next to Oliver Farnsworth? Millions! He's worth millions!

ELAINE

Well, he won't be giving me any.

MRS. PRINGLE

Can't he marry you? Aren't you going to try to make a good match for yourself? I fling every eligible man I can at your head. Can't you finish the rest yourself?

ELAINE

It's no use, mother, your trying to marry me off to anyone as important as he is. He frightens me to death. I lose my tongue. I'm as afraid of him as I'd be afraid of the Prince of Wales!

MRS. PRINGLE

The Prince of Wales! Oh! What wouldn't I give to have the Prince of Wales in my house! New York has lost its heart to him. I was just telling Mr. Farnsworth yesterday that I'd give anything to have the Prince here. I would establish my social position for life! And I've such a

reputation for being a wonderful hostess. [*The telephone rings.*] Dear me!—the phone—Hello—Mrs. Sedgwick—Yes—this is Mrs. Pringle—What? No—Oh! Caught in a snow-drift—can't get another car? [*She puts her hand over the telephone and speaks delightedly to Elaine.*] Good!—The widow can't come—that leaves us twelve—remove two plates, Dunham. [*Dunham removes two plates and Elaine changes the table-cards.*]

MRS. PRINGLE

[*At the telephone*] Oh! That's a shame! I'm heartbroken. Oh! My dear, how can we get along without you! But have you really *tried?* Oh, I'm reduced to tears. Good-bye, dear. [*She hangs up the receiver, and takes it down again.*] Well, I'm glad she dropped out—Central—give me Lakeview 5971—Dunham, with two *less,* you can *save* two cocktails and at least four glasses of champagne. [*Into the telephone*] Has Mr. Morgan come in yet? Well, don't give him the message I telephoned before about crossing the street to Mrs. Pringle's for dinner. It's too late—you understand? [*She hangs up the receiver.*] Well, anyway, I've invited Clem, returned my indebtedness and saved my champagne besides—

DUNHAM

The liquor is getting low, madam—what with prohibition and entertaining so much—

ELAINE

[*In dismay*] But, mother, if you only have

twelve people, Father can't sit at the head of the table.

MRS. PRINGLE

But he *has* to sit at the head. It looks too undignified when the man of the house is pushed to the side—

ELAINE

There's no other way. There must be a woman at each end—

MRS. PRINGLE

[*Distrait*] How absurd! I always forget. Of course twelve is an impossible number—[*She goes around the table looking at the place-cards.*] I don't want to put any of these women at the head —there's Mrs. Darby—such a cat—I wouldn't give her the honor and Mrs.—[*The telephone rings.*] Answer it, Dunham.

DUNHAM

Hello—Mrs. Pringle's residence—a message? Yes, sir—What, sir?—Mr. Darby—the doctor says your baby has the chicken-pox—

MRS. PRINGLE

Chicken-pox! Elaine!

ELAINE

Mother!

DUNHAM

Yes, sir. [*He hangs up the receiver.*] Mr. Darby sends his apologies—but owing to the transmutability of the disease, Mr. and Mrs. Darby feel

obliged to regret and also their house-guests, Mr. and Mrs. Fleetwood—

MRS. PRINGLE

That's four out.

ELAINE

Then you're only eight! Quick, the plates, Dunham—

[*She begins to remove chairs and gathers up silver and plates feverishly. Mrs. Pringle getting more and more distrait, helps. With so much unaccustomed help, Dunham gets confused and goes through many unnecessary motions; removes plates, breaks them, drops silver, aimlessly trying to hurry, his fingers all thumbs.*]

MRS. PRINGLE

Don't we know someone to invite the last minute—

ELAINE

The Hatwoods—

MRS. PRINGLE

They don't serve drinks when they entertain—I can't afford to invite them to drink mine—

ELAINE

The Greens—

MRS. PRINGLE

She's not interesting enough—

ELAINE

Mr. Conley—

MRS. PRINGLE

He never makes a dinner call, even after all the times I have invited him.

ELAINE

Hester Longley—

MRS. PRINGLE

Not at the same table with *you* and Oliver Farnsworth. She's far too pretty, too clever—

ELAINE

Where's our book? [*She runs her finger down the address book.*] The Tuppers?

MRS. PRINGLE

The Tuppers! Good Heavens, Elaine, six in the family.

ELAINE

That would get us back to fourteen; then father could sit at the *head* of the table.

MRS. PRINGLE

Well, try them. I'll rush and tell your father to hold up the drawing room— [*Exit left.*]

ELAINE

[*At the telephone*] Ridgeway 9325—This is Elaine Pringle—What Tupper am I speaking to? Oh, Ella, hello!—I hope you haven't finished your dinner—We had a party arranged here and the last moment everybody's been dropping out—the blizzard—Can't you flock your family around the corner and eat with us? Mother and I thought we knew you well enough to call you like this at the

seventh hour. You would? Oh! fine! [*To Dunham.*] Six more plates, Dunham. [*In the telephone.*] What?—Oh—well—but—[*She hesitates, stutters, looks distressed, muffles the telephone.*] Dunham, get *Mother* quick. [*In the telephone as Dunham hurries out of the room.*] Yes —yes—of course [*not enthusiastically*], love it—why certainly—yes, my dear—all right. [*She hangs up the receiver and puts her hand to her head with an ejaculation of dismay.*] Great Caesar, *now* what have I done!

MRS. PRINGLE

[*Rushes in followed by Dunham*] What's the matter—Elaine—what is—

ELAINE

Now I've done it! I've just done it—but I couldn't get out of it—I just couldn't—you weren't here—I always lose my head and bungle things—

MRS. PRINGLE

But what—don't keep us waiting like this—what *is* it?

ELAINE

I invited Ella and the family and she accepted and then she said they had two house-guests—and would it be all right and of course I said it would and now we're —*sixteen!*

DUNHAM

[*In dismay*] Sixteen! But, madam, the table's not that long!

MRS. PRINGLE

Elaine! That's just like you—no tact—no worldly wisdom—if I'd been at the 'phone I'd have politely said that my table—

ELAINE

But you weren't at the phone—you ought to attend to such messages yourself—you know I *always* lose my head—

DUNHAM

But the dishes, madam—and we only have *fourteen* squabs—

ELAINE

I won't eat any—

MRS. PRINGLE

But I must not be disgraced—we'll have to make the best of it—and insert another board—[*Dunham goes out. Mrs. Pringle and Elaine hurriedly remove part of the cloth.*]

ELAINE

But, mother, I needn't sit at the table.

MRS. PRINGLE

[*Pointing to a chair authoritatively*] You're *going to sit right there next to Oliver Farnsworth!* Now I don't wish to hear another word about it.

ELAINE

But can't we squeeze them in without all the work of adding another board? If I move the plates and chairs closer—

MRS. PRINGLE

Have you forgotten that Mr. Tupper weighs something like two hundred and fifty pounds? And Mrs. Conley has no waist line? It can't be done!—

DUNHAM

[*Entering with table board*] Cook is in a rage, madam—she says she has only prepared for fourteen.

MRS. PRINGLE

I can't help it—she'll have to prepare for *sixteen.* Tell her to open cans of soup and vegetables and—

DUNHAM

But the ice-cream forms and the gelatine molds—

ELAINE

I'll pretend I don't like them.

MRS. PRINGLE

And I'll pretend I'm on a diet—

ELAINE

But I really wouldn't have to be at the *table.*

MRS. PRINGLE

Be still! [*She starts as the telephone rings.*] The telephone! [*Her hand to her head.*] Now what? Don't answer it! It's driving me mad—[*She goes herself as Elaine and Dunham do not go.*] Hello—yes,—This is Mrs. Pringle—Oh! yes—Jessica!—what!—the blizzard—your cold—too dangerous! [*She waves to Dunham NOT to put*

the board in the table. Dunham, Elaine and Mrs. Pringle are delighted and relieved but Mrs. Pringle pretends otherwise over the telephone.] Oh! Jessica—you poor dear—yes, your husband's right, it would be foolhardy—put on a mustard plaster—hot toddy—go to bed—so sorry! [*She hangs up the receiver.*] There—that's *wonderful*—now we are *just* fourteen—

ELAINE

But the cards are all wrong. Only six are coming who were invited originally. You'll have to make another diagram. How do you want them seated?

MRS. PRINGLE

Give it to me. [*She remains at the telephone table where there is a pad and a pencil and makes a new diagram.*]

ELAINE

Here are some fresh cards. [*She tears up the old cards, then goes back to help Dunham, who is having a maddening time with the table.*]

MRS. PRINGLE

What a mess! I spent *hours* over that diagram! So much depends upon having guests seated harmoniously! There's the front door-bell, Dunham—I told Annie to answer it for you—but go, peek into the drawing-room and tell me who it is—[*As Dunham goes out, the telephone rings. Mrs. Pringle eyes it suspiciously.*] You murderous instrument! What have you to say? Now what? *Hello!* Who! Mr. Farnsworth! Mr. *Oliver*

Farnsworth? No—you're his *secretary?* He's *what? Instructed* you to make his excuses! He had to leave for Boston at once on very important business—Oh! [*She hangs up the receiver without completing the conversation and hits the telephone in a temper, then rises and paces back and forth in a rage.*] How *dare* he! How *dare* he! The last moment like this! No regard for a hostess's feelings! No regard for the efforts she goes to to provide an evening's enjoyment! And such a good dinner I planned—and he promised he would come—business! I don't believe it! He didn't want to exert himself—was afraid of freezing in the blizzard—as if he didn't have half a dozen limousines to carry him to the door—selfishness—downright rudeness—and worth millions—just a match for you, Elaine—and I was bound you should meet him and sit next to him at table [*she tears up his card*], and now I don't know when I can give you a chance like that again! I'm perfectly furious—I'll never speak to him again! I won't be treated that way—

ELAINE

[*Timidly*] Perhaps he really did have business and was called away—

MRS. PRINGLE

[*Not hearing her*] And I one of the most important hostesses in this city—people clamoring to receive my invitations—all my affairs are a success. I insist that they shall be—I can't bear a failure—I won't have a failure—he was my most

important guest—he's such a man's man—so important financially—every other man considers it an honor to meet him—and now not coming! I'm furious! Furious!—it's all this damnable blizzard!

ELAINE

Now I *will* have to stay away from the table. His not coming makes us thirteen again.

MRS. PRINGLE

[*In a temper*] Go to bed—go up to the nursery! I'll send you milk and crackers!

ELAINE

But, mother, it's not *my* fault that he had business out of town.

MRS. PRINGLE

Yes, it is! If you'd perk up a bit and not be so timid and make something of yourself, he would hear about your attractions from other men and be curious to meet you himself—Oh! What a family I have! No one to help me with my ambitions! Go to bed! I certainly won't sit down to thirteen—go to bed—get out of my sight—

[*Dunham enters from left.*]

DUNHAM

It was Mr. Morgan, madam—

MRS. PRINGLE

Mr. Morgan! But I telephoned his maid to tell him *not* to come.

DUNHAM

He couldn't have received the second message,

madam, for I heard him explaining to Mr. Pringle how happy he was to receive your telephone invitation.

ELAINE

That makes you thirteen again—unless you don't want me to go to bed—

MRS. PRINGLE

Of course I don't want you to go to bed. We're back to where we started—fourteen, Dunham.

DUNHAM

I'll get the cocktails ready, madam. Annie told me there were several motors making their way through the snow. It's late now and cook's swearing about the dinner getting too dry—[*The telephone rings. Elaine jumps.*]

ELAINE

I won't answer it.

MRS. PRINGLE

I should say not—hello—what is it? [*Sharply.*] Yes—yes? Mrs. Tupper! Yes! Mrs. Tupper! But now you *must* come—we're prepared for you—yes—for eight of you—Your daughter told my daughter about your house-guests and we are delighted to have them—but now we're *set* for you—but every plate *is* set—but your daughter was quite right—it wasn't an imposition at all—but you *must* come now—of course my daughter had authority to invite the guests—Oh—eight isn't at all a big number—there is room—the table is all set—but I beg of you—but my dear, you are *not*

imposing—Oh! but how foolish of you to take that stand! Why my dear, my dear—[*She hangs up the receiver.*] Now, what do you think of that? Mrs. Tupper is perfectly furious at Ella for telling you about the house-guests, and says Ella has no tact; that nothing would induce her to bring eight when we invited six—so she's leaving Ella and Henry at home—only six are coming. Remove two plates, Dunham—we're twelve after all—

ELAINE

But if you leave it twelve, father *can't* sit at the *end*—

MRS. PRINGLE

[*Exhausted, harassed, angry, tempestuous*] I shall go mad! I'll never entertain again—never—never—people ought to know whether they're coming or not—but they accept and regret and regret and accept—they drive me wild. [*Dunham goes out.*] This is my last dinner party—*my very last*—a fiasco—an utter fiasco! A haphazard crowd—hurried together—when I had planned everything so beautifully—now how shall I seat them—how shall I seat them? If I put Mr. Tupper here and Mrs. Conley there then Mrs. Tupper has to sit next to her husband and if I want Mr. Morgan there—Oh! It's impossible—I might as well put their names in a hat and draw them out at random—never again! I'm through! Through with society—with parties—with friends—I wipe my slate clean—they'll miss my entertainments—they'll wish they had been more considerate—after this, I'm going to live for myself!

I'm going to be selfish and hard—and unsociable—and drink my liquor myself instead of offering it gratis to the whole town!—I'm *through—Through* with men like Oliver Farnsworth!—I don't care how rich they are! How influential they are—how important they are! They're nothing without courtesy and consideration—business—off on train—nonsense—didn't want to come—didn't want to meet a sweet, pretty girl—didn't want to marry her—well, he's not good enough for you!—don't you marry him! Don't you dare to marry him! I won't let you marry him! Do you hear? If you tried to elope or anything like that, I'd break it off—yes, I would—*Oliver Farnsworth* will never get recognition again from me!—He is beneath my notice! I hate Oliver Farnsworth!

[*Dunham enters with a note on a silver plate.*]

DUNHAM

A note from Mr. Farnsworth, madam—

MRS. PRINGLE

A note from Mr. Farnsworth! [*She takes and opens it.*]

DUNHAM

Yes, madam, there are two strange gentlemen in the lower hall. They presented this letter. He said he was the secretary. All the other guests are upstairs in the drawing-room, madam, I counted twelve in all, including you and Mr. Pringle and Miss Elaine. But the two gentlemen downstairs, madam, are waiting for your answer—the one gentleman's face looked very familiar, madam, but

I can't just place him—although I'm sure I've seen his face somewhere—

MRS. PRINGLE

[*She has been reading the note and is almost fainting with surprise and joy*] *Seen* his *face—somewhere*—Oh, my goodness! Elaine—It's the Prince of Wales!

DUNHAM

The secretary said you cut off the telephone or central disconnected you. He was about to tell you that Mr. Farnsworth knew that the blizzard had prevented His Highness from keeping an engagement way up town—

MRS. PRINGLE

The Prince of Wales sitting in my lower hall—waiting for *me* to ask him to dinner—

ELAINE

Then we'll be thirteen again—

DUNHAM

There's the secretary, Miss, he is his bodyguard—

MRS. PRINGLE

[*Rising to the occasion*] Certainly, the secretary, Elaine. We shall be fourteen at dinner—Serve the cocktails, Dunham—the guests may sit anywhere they choose. I shall bring the Prince in with *me!*

ELAINE

[*Following*] But mother, wasn't it nice of Oliver Farnsworth to send a Prince in his place?

MRS. PRINGLE

Didn't I always say that Oliver Farnsworth was the most considerate of men?

ELAINE

I think I shall *like* Mr. Farnsworth.

MRS. PRINGLE

Silly child! It is too late now to like Mr. Farnsworth. It's time now to like the Prince. [*Starting out*] I always manage somehow to be the most successful of hostesses! Thank God for the blizzard!

CURTAIN

THE ILLUMINATI IN DRAMA LIBRE

A SATIRE ON FUTURIST AND CUBIST PAINTING

This sketch was produced for the first time at the studio of Miss Grace Hickox, Chicago, and it was played by Alice Gerstenberg and William Zeigler Nourse.

The following explanation may be printed on a program or some one may announce it on the stage before the entrance of the characters:

"Miss Gerstenberg has written this frenzied bit of Futuristic and Cubistic drama as an experiment—to show that if the painters of the day paint pictures wherein color and its emotional reaction upon the spectators is the main reason for painting, the same motive may be applied to drama. The fragment of drama which follows leaves guesswork to the audience as to the relation of the characters to each other, as to the plot, as to the time and place of its occurrence; it is nothing but words—as an artist flings color upon the canvas so have words been flung upon the stage—that the audience may have the emotional joy of discovering, each for himself, what it is all about."

Copyrighted, 1919, by Alice Gerstenberg

THE ILLUMINATI IN DRAMA LIBRE

Two characters, He and She, are dressed absurdly in the most vivid colors suggestive of the riot of cubist pictures. Their faces are painted in cubes and squares, etc., in colors, crimson, purple, green, etc.

The scene is before the curtain of a stage. If it parts in the centre the characters make a whirlwind entrance that way and use the curtain as a background to silhouette them.

The characters whirl in.

HE

[*Flirtatiously*] Well?

SHE

[*Flirtatiously*] Well?

HE

Who?

SHE

Guess.

HE

Impossible!

SHE

Try.

HE

Then?

SHE

Answer!

HE

What?

SHE

Truth.

HE

Again?

SHE

Stop!

HE

Here?

SHE

No.

HE

There?

SHE

No!

HE

Answer!

SHE

No!

HE

[*In despair*] Whereupon—

SHE

[*In tears*] Never—

HE

Indeed?

SHE

Gone—

HE

Valued—

SHE

Much—

HE

How—

SHE

Very—

HE

Terrible!

SHE

Nevertheless—

HE

[*Angrily*] Impudence!

SHE

[*Resentfully*] Go!

HE

Yes—

SHE

[*Pleading*] Come—

HE

Why—

SHE

Why not?

HE

But if—

SHE

It might—

HE

Could it—

SHE

Do you?

HE

For life—

SHE

Forever—

HE

Although I—

SHE

Whereas you—

HE

Because she—

SHE

You care—

HE

Whether you—

SHE

Or I—

HE

Either one—

SHE

[*In horror*] Moreover—

HE

[*In doubt*] Was it so?

SHE

You doubt?

HE

Proof?

SHE

There it is— [*Points out front.*]

HE

Where is it?

SHE

Are words nothing?

HE

Everything!

SHE

[*Dramatically*] Enough!

HE

Quite but—

SHE

But what?

HE

Where is it?

SHE

Look!

HE

[*In agony*] I cannot—

SHE

You will not—

HE

Curses—

SHE

How dare you?

HE

I denounce—

SHE

Leave me!

HE

Not before—

SHE

At once!

HE

Answer me!

SHE

I won't!

HE

You will!

SHE

[*Inspirationally*] Sunrise—

HE

You've said it—

SHE

Said what?

HE

The truth—

SHE

[*Great and loud emotion*] Words, words, words!

HE

I'll not let—

SHE

[*Terrific grief*] Electric bulbs—

HE

[*Sternly*] That ends it!

SHE

Quite mad!

HE

Fool.

SHE

Coward!

HE

Come—

SHE

No—

HE

Don't resist—

SHE

The law!

HE

A star—

SHE

You?

HE

I!

SHE

I didn't know—

HE

Of course not—

SHE

I don't believe it!

HE

Imprisoned!

SHE

You wouldn't—

HE

[*Flings her across stage*] Inevitable!

SHE

I implore you.

HE

Without doubt—

SHE

Forgive—

HE

Too late—

SHE

Love?

HE

Love?

SHE

Love, love, love!

HE

[*Rapturously*] Love!

SHE

[*Cautiously*] The ring—

HE

They're coming—

SHE

Hide me—

HE

You must pay—

SHE

The letter?

HE

Which one?

SHE

His to you—

HE

Ah that!

SHE

Out with it—

HE

You read it?

SHE

Never!

HE

Give it to me—

SHE

No—

HE

Command!

SHE

Now your answer—

HE

Revenge!

SHE

You dare—

HE

My promise—

SHE

[*Passionately*] On your knees—

HE

Vampire—

SHE

You beg—

HE

No—

SHE

Yes—

HE

No!

SHE

Yes!

HE

[*Struggling with her*] No!

SHE

[*Struggling with him*] Yes!

HE

No!

SHE

Yes!

HE

No!

SHE

[*Looking about wildly for something to overpower him*] Crimson, blue—

HE

[*Feeling his ears hurt by the mention of the colors*] Oh!

SHE

[*Pouncing upon other colors*] Violet! Purple

HE

[*Getting weaker and weaker*] Hush!

SHE

[*Raging*] Orange, yellow!

HE

[*Finding it unbearable*] Stop! Stop!

SHE

[*Climax yell*] MAGENTA!

HE

[*Overcome*] Oh, my head!

[*They both disappear wildly behind curtains.*]

COLLEGE OF MARIN
3 2555 00074345 5

Date Due

JAN 2 8 1947		
OCT 1 c 1947		
OCT 2 1 1947		
Scott		
SEP 1 8 '57		
SEP 2 8 '61		
MAR 30 '66		
JAN 4 '67		
FEB 2 c 1971		
FEB 2 5 1971		
MAR 23 '72		
NOV 8 '73		
DEC 20 '73		
FEB 1 7 1977		
NOV 1 0 1977		
SEP 7 1978		
OCT 2 8 1982		
MAY 1 5 1986		

Library Bureau Cat. no. 1137

COM

In Ottemillen

14440

PS
3513
E869T4
1921